

The Hunt for Scott Turner

Thomas Park

Chapter 1

Detective Bunt Sidecull pulled up to his office in a long, brown 1993 Ford Fairmont. He tried to park smoothly in his usual spot-- on a hill affording him a view of Chinatown's bar district, and to his left his office-- but ended up rear-ending the car in front of him. It was a light rear-ender. . .

Nothing starts off a day on the wrong foot like an embarrassing accident, and Sidecull was forced to walk up to his office with people jeering and laughing at him about the rear-ender he had pulled.

Bunt had spent some extra time on his hair this morning. He had decided to use a new gel. The gel was supposed to condition his hair. Then it was supposed to come off with a rinse. But the gel had stuck in his hair, and he looked like an overweight Christopher Reeves before his accident.

The other tenants in his office-- a variety of businesses, including an insurance office, a real estate agent, some telemarketers, and so on had commented one and all as he passed by on his new hairdo. Bunt tried to brush their comments aside, but he could not seem to. They stuck.

Bunt finally reached his office on the third floor and shut and locked the door behind him. He threw his newspaper on a pile of papers in the corner-- a pile so tall that the oldest paper dated years back. He couldn't afford a secretary, and there were no pretty B-girls around anymore to volunteer their time.

He sat down at his desk. He looked at his desk. There was a clock, an empty letter-opener holder, and an old ball point pen. The pen was right where he had thrown it the previous Friday.

Bunt needed a case, and he would be lucky to get one in this city.

San Francisco was like California's carry-out box. You either lived in Los Angeles or you were stupid. You could make it in San Francisco if you had connections in Los Angeles, or worked in the industrial block, but if you were an average guy, you just got by.

On the other hand, Bunt was strangely fond of San Francisco. He had cool neighbors, and had even gotten sentimental about the place. He liked trading tips and coupons with his fellow apartment dwellers, and enjoyed looking at their wives and magazines. For a minute or two now and then, anyway.

Married men, he feared, could make the best detectives if he let them. Better than him, maybe.

Bunt passed an excruciatingly boring morning. There was no way to put words to how bored he felt. He ended up looking at the clock, the letter-opener holder, then the ballpoint pen over and over again. . . then at the door.

Finally, about noon, he got a phone call. A woman was on the line-- her name was Sean Gellarty. She said she had met a man-- some guy named Turner. Turner had taken her under his wing and promised to help her out, maybe to marry her. They had made plans for a wedding and right away Turner had disappeared-- she wanted Bunt to find him and to make sure the two of them finalized their marriage.

Bunt asked her where she had heard of his detective agency. She said from an old coupon she found at the mall.

The woman had sounded upset and Bunt thought she might be kind of stupid. Or naive, maybe. Why would a woman trust a man who had proposed to her until they had at least picked out a dress and a tuxedo? If Turner was like Bunt, he would have enjoyed talking about a wedding, but probably would have balked before getting married.

But the guy was rich, guessed Bunt, and must have looked pretty good. He probably had charmed her right into his car and starting making claims about all the ways he could help her.

He called Sean Gellarty back and took her case. He got to part about the money. He gave her an estimate-- \$5000. Ms. Gellarty asked him the big question-- could he find Turner? Could he promise to find him?

Bunt looked at the clock, the letter-opener, and the ball point pen. He looked out the window, and at the sky.

He promised her he would try.

Chapter 2

Bunt had a strategy. He had a friend in the police force. He could get a description of Turner and see if any similar cases had been reported, maybe under the "missing persons" heading.

Bunt called Gellarty and asked for her description of Turner. She said he was a medium tall man with blond hair, slender and in his late forties. He had no limp, no obvious scars, and two pale blue eyes.

Bunt would take it up with the police.

Gerald Duffy, Lt. 2nd Class, San Francisco Police, was Bunt's contact. They usually met at a Chinese place down the hill from Bunt's office. Then, Duffy would do his footwork and get a hold of Bunt.

Cops aren't supposed to help private detectives. There's a rigorous discipline concerning this kind of thing in the police force. Many case files are protected by password, and only certain ranks of officers are allowed to see them, and only for certain reasons. If the police found out about Bunt's thing with Duffy, they would probably suspend his badge-- or they might even kick him off the force.

Duffy told Sidecull one time he had been in the police office and had been looking up a case for him-- an old runaway case about some teenage kid who had taken off with some buddies and had left with his mother's purse and some other stuff with him. The Captain had spied him in the records room looking kind of nervous and had taken his badge for a day. Bunt repaid him that evening with a double serving of curly shrimp rice and many, many apologies for his troubles.

Bunt met Duffy at the restaurant about 8:30 PM. It was a busy night, and all kinds of interesting or drunk people were walking around who would forever remain anonymous. Sidecull pulled into a parking spot and roughly ran up and down the gears before putting on the brake. He had had a car roll once-- it had gotten about ten feet before it had hit a black BMW. That had cost him a few weeks' pay.

Bunt walked slowly into the restaurant. Duffy was there already, helping himself to some Mandarin Chicken-- the hot stuff. He asked the waiter for a glass of water and brought it to the table.

He asked Duffy how things were at the force. Duffy told Bunt someone had dropped off a homeless guy that morning, and they had spent all day looking for a good shelter for him. Lots of bigger stuff-- blue-collar crime, drug running, etc. was going on, but Duffy never got the drug cases, unless, it was just for a joint taken from some drifter.

Bunt told Duffy the private detective thing was going pretty well. He handed him a spoonful of rice to water down his chicken, and told him not to eat the peppers.

Bunt told him a woman named Gellarty was looking for a man named Turner-- some guy, medium height, blond, blue eyes, no visible scars-- who had approached her and seduced her. He had promised to marry her, but had run off right before their wedding. He grimaced. Could Duffy help him out with this?

Duffy looked a little taken aback. . . Turner. . . Turner. . . he seemed not to recognize the name. Then he knocked back his plate and said he'd join the hunt for this Turner. He would look for similar cases ASAP and call Bunt the next day with the results.

Bunt thanked him, feeling, for some reason, increasingly nervous. He didn't like this case somehow. He felt like he had really stumbled into this thing, and Turner had just pulled him in

like a piece of metal to a magnet. Bunt stared at his foot. He just could not say no to this case. For that kind of money there was no turning back.

Bunt went home and cracked open a bottle of beer. It didn't help much. He began to reflect on why the case bothered him.

Turner was really a symbol of all that Bunt hated about California. Fast cars, relationships without sentiment, big buildings that just bounce your reflection right back off their mirrored exteriors.

Bunt had had a girlfriend once. She was a real free spirit-- a wanderer. Her name had been Rose. He had met her just out of college, and had fallen for her immediately, and, for some reason, she had fallen for him. Bunt supposed she had thought he was on the fast track, because he had a degree and was interviewing a lot at the time. Plus he had had short hair. Maybe she thought he was about to get a job somewhere else, and was going to move away. Because his apparent success had attracted her and for some reason she also decided that she had no need to commit to him. When he had asked her to marry him, she had said no and had left that very day.

Bunt's beer was empty. He didn't even remember finishing it. Good old Budweiser, he thought, somehow seeming to miss the spirit he was truly in.

Turner couldn't get away with it. You can't get on somebody's good side and then leave them in the lurch. It's just not right.

Bunt looked in the mirror. It was cracked in the center, but he could see, though one half of his face was in shadow and the other in light, that he was looking OK. Though he could use a shave, and the gel in his hair had started to run. The expensive gel he had bought to make his hair look like a star's. Did Turner gel his hair? Probably, thought Bunt.

He wanted to call Gellarty.

He dialed her number. She answered right away. She had been thinking about Turner again and couldn't sleep. Bunt told her right away that Duffy had taken Turner's description to the police department and would let him know if he found any matches.

She said that was good.

There was a moment of silence.

Bunt pictured himself in the mirror.

He told Gellarty that she could pay him \$1000 up front, and the rest of the money when Turner was found. She said that was a good idea. He remembered Rose, and how she had gotten the wrong idea about him. About the fast track thing and all.

Bunt was glad the Chinese food and beer smells didn't carry across the phone line. He asked Gellarty if she would meet him the next day at a cafe at the top of the Chinatown Bar district. There were certain confusing details concerning the Turner affair that he wanted to ask her about, and he was hoping she could help him get a bead on the guy. She agreed to meet him there.

He hung up and thought about calling Rose. Then, he laughed. He didn't have her number. Tragic.

Bunt peeled off his sticky clothes, set his alarm clock, and went to sleep. He dreamt of Turner, as he pictured him-- in a car, on his feet, blond hair in the wind, always moving, never stopping to eat, piss, shit, just moving, moving, moving. And of himself in the cracked mirror-- the way the light on the right side made his gray hair look lighter.

Scott Krull was working out. He had a free pass to a local gymnasium, and liked to show up at around 5:30 AM, when all the working women got there. He had an expensive breathable suit and a sleek body with toned, powerful muscles.

He was working at the free weights. There were women around, including a sexy brunette just a few yards away doing leg lifts. She looked married. He lapsed into a blurry, perpetual rhythm and let her image slip away.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

I must keep running.

Six. Seven. Eight. Nine.

Past Smith, past Murphy, past Gellarty.

Ten. Eleven. Twelve.

I will live until the age of ninety.

And look just this way.

And always be free.

Thank God.

Bunt had a hard time waking up. He looked in the mirror-- this time almost all of his hair had a special glow to it. His few gray hairs stood out in the sunlight, and his whole head of hair was bathed in light.

He threw on some clothes, counted some bills into his wallet, put on his watch, and went back to the mirror. He was perspiring a bit, and couldn't seem to get his bearings.

He was nervous.

Bunt got in his car, and wound his way through the traffic. He kept getting distracted by peripheral things-- other cars, people, street signs. . . and had a hard time preventing himself from looking at them. Usually he was more focused.

He checked his hair in the car mirror. He was under a shadow, so it was back to looking its natural dark. The gray was just a series of flecks. The gel looked more natural today.

He got up and walked and had the strange sensation that someone was looking at his ass. Why would someone look at his ass? They probably weren't really looking, but he felt that way sometimes. It made his knees shake a little.

Gellarty must have been running late. Bunt took a table. Some gel leaked off of his hair onto the table, and he said to himself, Goddamn. He ordered a double espresso on ice.

Espresso can give a guy a certain kind of superpower. But it's a really dangerous kind of superpower. Like you could kick over five tables and make it to the restroom in a split second, but you'd probably pee yourself or crack a urinal with your bare hands once you got there.

The cafe was sporting several modernist paintings. Mostly they were of strange red and turquoise spirals or people with giant egg heads and yarn for eyebrows. Bunt felt sorry for the artist who had made all that crap. They always charge \$200 per piece and never sell a thing.

He had looked at the egg-headed man painting 12 times when Gellarty finally showed up.

She was attractive. Bunt thought she looked like Rose for a second, but that scared him-- he choked out a hello. She said hello back.

Her hair was dark and long. Past the shoulders. Her forehead was smooth and white, and from her lips, slightly parted, emerged a quiet aspirating sound.

He wished he didn't have to talk business with this woman, but, then again, the artist of those paintings didn't want to have to charge \$200 for them either-- some things a person had to do to just to get by.

Duffy had been busy on a petty drug case, and the force was on his back, so he didn't have time to give me his report on Turner. Bunt told Gellarty he didn't have much to go on, but was hopeful, and ordered her a cup of coffee.

She didn't seem to want to drink the coffee, though she said thanks. Bunt's espresso was long

finished.

He gave her a longer history of himself-- he had a college degree, had been a private detective for several years, and had cracked about 30 cases. He didn't mention Rose; he was afraid he might get upset.

She seemed somewhat interested, though she kept looking around at the paintings and such in the coffeehouse.

Bunt asked her if she liked Mr. Egghead, and she laughed and pointed her finger at him. The jukebox started playing "Spirits In The Material World" by the Police. Bunt thought more about the case and the description of Turner, and tried not to dwell on his early 90's bar life, of which the song reminded him.

He ordered another espresso and asked Gellarty to tell him about her history with Turner. She seemed to want to talk about it.

Gellarty told him this tall, blond handsome man had picked her up in a white 1995 Cadillac Sedan on her way home from the movies. He had seen she was walking, and asked her simply if she wanted to have a lift. Her parents had wanted her not to take rides with strangers, but this looked just like the kind of guy her parents would have wanted her to marry anyway, so she agreed.

On the way home, he told her to look around her. They had been driving through a commercial district. Turner said he knew the architect who had designed half of these buildings, and that one of them was where he worked.

He didn't mention which building.

Then Turner had asked her about herself, and she had said she was a movie fan who helped to manage a series of Laundromats. She had been a little ashamed of it all, but admitted with some reluctance that she was single, and had thought that this was better than the movie she had just seen.

Turner took that opportunity to ask her for her number, and to give her his business card.

She showed the card to Bunt. It said, Scott Turner, Accounting-- Forward Thinking Enterprises.

This had led to a series of dates. Each time Scott would call, and tell her he had plans, and explain in perfect detail the list of expensive restaurants and clubs where they would go. He would pick her up right on time, and spend scores of dollars every night on her food and entertainment.

He seemed like a perfect gentleman, and never even mentioned sex or tried to give her a

goodnight kiss until about a month into the relationship.

One night, Scott took her to a Thai restaurant, her favorite kind. He bought her about 5 fruity drinks, and, calmly as ever, asked her if he could come home with her.

The details got hazy at this point, but Gellarty mentioned some adult contemporary cds he had brought with him, a ten thousand dollar engagement ring he had promised her, and his somewhat masculine insistence he accompany her into her bedroom. All things considered, she had agreed.

Though Scott seemed somewhat a mystery to her in many ways, he was a powerful and generous man who always got her exactly what she needed. She imagined having a new house and children who looked just like Scott except they would have a little dark on the edges of their hair from her, and she wound up wanting to marry him.

She was afraid to bring up her marriage idea. The parade of bars and restaurants continued, and she couldn't seem to broach the subject. They kept sleeping together, and by the time he had showered the next morning and put on his suit, she still couldn't seem to ask him about getting married.

After exactly one more month, on the anniversary of their first lovemaking, Scott proposed to her. Just from her phone calls, her parents already loved him, and she had come to rely on him. She had said yes. He had knelt before her in the beautiful modern private 3rd floor of a Thai restaurant, and she had said yes.

That day was the last time she had seen Scott Turner.

He had simply disappeared. He wouldn't answer his pager and had never given her his phone number, telling her that would come later. She couldn't find "Forward Thinking Enterprises" in the phone book, though there were similar businesses like "Blue Horizon" and "Big Perpetual Tomorrow", and she succeeded only in annoying a bunch of innocent and anonymous businesspeople and making herself feel sadder and more resolute every minute..

In the industrial block where he said he worked, Gellarty had spent hours searching for Scott's business, but had not found it-- searching until the buildings looked familiar and the sun was going down and her legs had turned numb.

Gellarty told Bunt that she thought she was in love with Scott Turner, and asked Bunt if he could help her find him, and reestablish their relationship so she could go through with the wedding.

Bunt asked Gellarty again about the industrial block Turner had told her about. He said he would follow her lead and search it . He told her that his casework with the police was no big deal right now, but he would tell her if anything about Turner showed up.

Bunt looked down at his hands. One clasped the other firmly. He thought about Rose, and felt

a deep inner sadness that was all too familiar. He took his leave of the cafe-- Gellarty stayed on, wanting to hang out for awhile.

Bunt had been very impressed by the story, and saw how Gellarty could have fallen for Turner. At the same time, he felt a profound anger for Turner for so brazenly using such a pretty girl, and then simply forging ahead. What motivated the man? Was it pride? Lust? Greed? He wanted to find out.

Bunt checked himself. It would be awhile before Duffy got his report on Turner ready, and he was stuck in San Francisco, with his nice neighbors, a dingy office, and lots of time to spend searching the industrial block.

He got into his beat-up old car and drove to the office.

Bunt sat around for awhile at his desk. He would investigate the industrial block tomorrow. "Forward Thinking Enterprises" might be on a certain floor or a building Gellarty had not seen, but then again, there may be no "Forward Thinking Enterprises".

Bunt looked at his desk again. He looked at the clock and the envelope opener, but couldn't quite make it to the ball-point pen.

Bunt was thinking about Turner. What Turners did he know? Ike Turner. Ted Turner. Who else? Did he have a wife like Ike? Did he beat his Tina? Was he a cable television mogul with a shiny new network? Turner seemed like a Ted Turner type, but would have been too obsessed with his anonymity to have a publicly accessible television show. Maybe Turner was a traveling man, never able to settle down. He had inherited his money-- or maybe stolen it.

Bunt made his tie do a backflip over his shoulder. Rose had handed him ten hundred dollar bills to last him until he solved the case. He could buy a new suit or a new pair of shoes, but he felt too depressed and somehow preoccupied at the same time to go shopping.

Although there were these shoes he had been looking at for awhile. Over at Turnabout's. Black, shiny shoes like his father had worn, with black tassels. Polished to perfection. They had been sitting behind Turnabout's dusty window for over a year. Should he buy them now?

Would Gellarty like the shoes? Rose would have. They made him look like he had made it in life somehow. . .

He thought about Gellarty and remembered their conversation. The way her breath aspirated between her teeth. . . Her long black hair. . . she was like Rose, only more, well-- maybe more West Coast Gothic. His espresso had made him jumpy, but she had seemed to calm him.

Until she started talking about Turner. The woman still loved Turner. That was like Tina still loving Ike. Was she his private dancer? She couldn't be Bunt's, then. A slight warm breeze

carrying garlic and peppers blew in through a strangely obtrusive crack in the window.

He must try to find Turner. Turner would then do one of two things. He would either come back to Gellarty-- maybe marry her-- or he would refuse to return, and continue his mysterious, wealthy, low-profile existence.

The telephone rang. It was Duffy. He asked Bunt to meet him at the restaurant.

Bunt pulled into his spot at the Chinese restaurant. He went in and sat at a corner table. They always said in the old stories to sit at the corner table, with your back to the wall, so you can see everyone. No one can surprise you. Bunt wasn't running from any crooks, so he didn't have to do this. But he liked old writers like Thompson and McBain, and thought that their detective stories were compelling. He owned most of McBain's books; some were stained with hair gel from when he had leaned too close to them or sat in the heat and the gel had rolled off of his head onto the book.

McBain had been into police procedurals. His hero, Carella was a tall, handsome, sad-faced man who always wised his way through his cases. He worked at the Precinct, and his partners were of all types-- a Jewish detective named Meyer Meyer-- bald and feisty-- Cotton Hawes, a big, handsome redhead with a white streak in his hair where he had been knifed-- he wondered what it would have been like to work in Carella's Precinct.

Bunt ate his way through a carry-out box of beef fried rice until he had accidentally poked a hole through its greasy base. Comically, he started looking at fellow diners through the hole-- and saw Duffy.

Duffy and Bunt exchanged greetings. Then Duffy began giving Bunt the lowdown on Turner.

It turns out several women had complained about a medium height blond man starting relationships with them, then running away without breaking things off-- right before a planned marriage. Duffy had spoken with two of them-- there were five women-- and had been unsure as to the exact description of the man. One woman said he had a short beard. The other said he was clean-shaven. Both agreed with some certainty that the man was medium height and blond with no scars or defects, just like Turner.

The other three women had filed reports with the San Francisco Police concerning Turner. Each report matched fairly closely the original description of Turner. Duffy said the reports were customarily maintained for one year precisely in the "recent complaints" database, then relegated to the "old cases" database.

Duffy was a 2nd Lieutenant. He usually took on smaller cases. He was allowed access to the "old cases" database whenever he wanted. He often found good leads there, including a case he had cracked concerning a police impersonator back in 1998 who had a previous record in Los Angeles. He had to get through the chief to get access to the "recent complaints" database.

Usually captains and other high-ranking officials only were allowed access to these files.

The force kept a thorough database. Each report included, among other information:

1. The complainant's name
2. Their gender
3. Their height and weight
4. Other physically determining factors: eye color, scars, marks, etc.
5. Their address
6. Their phone number
7. Their employer's address
8. Their employer's number
9. Their marital status
10. Their complaint

The tenth entry allowed for multiple complaints concerning the same case, and often involved several phone conversations or interviews.

The resulting database was very large and very helpful.

The current complaints looked just like the old complaints. This was true back to the fifties--the records department had re-entered the data from old cases (including the police impersonator) back to 1953.

It was actually to the force's credit that only certain individuals could gain access to the newer files. Duffy felt bad about having to go behind his captain's back, but he was able to distract the captain by asking for his help when an old drunk in a khaki jacket burst into the front door and claimed he had just solved a fifty year old case. Duffy asked for the captain's help, and slipped away during the confusion. He ran a quick scan of cases whose objects fitted Turner's description, and sent the files to a printer in the main room.

Duffy had just managed to flip the database back to home when the drunk, immobilized and handcuffed, was brought to the second floor.

Bunt didn't know whether to thank Duffy or run off with the files. He was quite excited-- if he could talk to the women who had known Turner, or, at least, if he could find a pattern in the way Turner moved, he might be able to help Gellarty. He really wanted to help Gellarty.

Well, Duffy had been a big help, yet again. He couldn't have a better friend in the force. He had been through situations with Duffy that would have made a Thompson or a McBain run for their typewriters, and all he ever paid him with was Chinese food.

Bunt knew that Duffy had been wanting to take his wife for a trip to Los Vegas for a family vacation, but he didn't know if he could afford it. Bunt reached into his pocket and took out three hundred dollar bills and handed them to Duffy. Duffy looked a little surprised, but only put up a

short fight. He took the money and said thanks from himself and his wife.

Bunt left the restaurant. He wanted to phone Gellarty, but decided to search the industrial plaza first. He was so anxious, he felt he was halfway there-- halfway to finding Turner.

Chapter 3

Veal Hamm was on her way to the bank. She had just gotten paid, and had her weekly \$200 in her purse. The road rose ahead of her. . . she had about 1/2 mile left to walk. She was sweating daintily but uncomfortably, and was beginning to feel a little spacey, as she often did when she walked long distances.

Veal worked at a Hallmark plant. She helped to write the inscriptions on Hallmark cards, and had gotten pretty good at it. She could write a card for any occasion, and sometimes her girlfriends asked her to pen a line or two for them when they were making homemade cards for holidays.

Hallmark was really a place for Veal to pay her dues. She had graduated from High School and gone to Community College for 2 years, but had not earned a bachelor's degree. She had spent several years looking for good work, and had worked assembling plastic parts at a factory, selling women's shoes, and selling escalators to shopping malls before she had finally found Hallmark and decided to stick with it.

Veal tried very hard at Hallmark. Some people think those inscriptions are easy to invent, and some of her colleagues seemed to have an easy time of it. Veal took a long time with her inscriptions. If the card was supposed to be humorous, she made sure it was funny. If it was religious, she thought about going to church and really tried to capture the mood. You couldn't really say she was selling out, because she tried so hard to do what she did well.

Veal had had boyfriends. Her last boyfriend, George, had met her at a Valentine's Day dance at the gym she used to go to. He had said something funny to her-- that with her legs looking like that, he wondered if he might take a walk with her. She had told George that if her father was younger, she'd marry him, but George looked pretty much good enough. They had gotten along well, and had become what her girlfriends called "The Sweetest Couple." He had broken up with her when his mother had caught leukemia. He had to go to Washington to stay with her at a hospital. Veal had tried to comfort George and persuade him to stay or to let her come with him. For some reason, all of her appeals had fallen short.

To this day she was sad about losing George, and had a hard, bittersweet time writing Valentine's Day cards. She felt like she had nothing much to offer in that department.

She was surprised and a little frightened when a 1995 Cadillac Sedan pulled up beside her on the road. She had seen cars like this before, but was amazed to actually be close to one. It was very long, and very white and very shiny.

A medium height blonde man, very handsome, got out of the car. She thought he looked a lot like that actor Bill Holden with his nice, combed hair, youthful face, thin but powerful physique and perfect teeth. The man walked up to her and said his name was Scott Turner. He asked her if he needed a ride. Veval hesitated for a moment, somehow wishing he had never pulled over. She looked around her-- at the shops, the cars, and the 1/2 mile ahead of her, and then at him. When she looked at him the second time she tried but could not say no.

Veval got in Scott's car, and Scott pulled into the traffic, slowly accelerating to the 45-mph speed limit.

Bunt pulled into the industrial plaza. Turner's business had to be in one of four blocks, according to Gellarty. He wanted to find "Forward Thinking Enterprises"-- really to find it-- and to nail Turner. If it was around here, he would either find him at work or someone there would have heard of him.

He couldn't much go on Gellarty's hints-- she had given him some general ideas, but had been so upset when she searched that she didn't remember enough to help him considerably.

Bunt suddenly wished Gellarty was with him. She was a pretty woman, and he was beginning to think about her more and more. Turner had been smart-- he had a good eye. The man would not stop for anything, and Gellarty hadn't really tried to stop him, either.

Turner decided to round each of the four blocks, walking from the Northeast corner South, then West, then North, then East again, then to the next Northern block. He would start with the most Southern industrial plaza block.

The industrial plaza was really a testament to Reaganomics and rapidly-built, impressive architecture. Bunt was from San Francisco, but this was more like Los Angeles-- people might even have commuted here from Los Angeles. You could disappear in one of these office buildings and emerge a new man-- with a new fortune.

Bunt walked into his first building. The lobby was small but intimidating-- air-conditioned, with dark wooden walls and a few pieces of futuristic art-- a painting with gray, black and pink paint lines, thrown there, apparently, by the artist, a perfect cube of glass on a pedestal and a weird flower vase with artificial flowers that really stuck out because they were so fake.

Bunt found the elevator. He couldn't go up-- he saw this-- because a card or pass of some sort was required. A newcomer to the building could only pace circles in the lobby unless they had an elevator pass.

He looked at the list of businesses:

Graystone Monuments
Desert Air

Has Success Eluded You, Ltd.
New For You, Inc.
Serendipity
Earthquake! Insurance

There was no "Forward Thinking Enterprises", per se. Some of the businesses resembled "Forward Thinking Enterprises" to a degree, but none were a close enough a match to be the same business.

Bunt sighed and slumped his shoulders. The sweat that had begun to pool under his arms squished nastily. He already felt a little burned out, like a kid after walking 3 miles for dessert and eating several ice cream cones too fast. But he would not give up.

After entering the lobbies of about 12 industrial buildings, Bunt had finally abandoned his quest-- without finding a single lead. He had seen Cadillacs drive by, but not the white 1995 sedan he was looking for.

He had found dozens of businesses-- "Flowers By Mail", "Dial-A-Christ", "Driveways For You", "Your Valhalla", "Labyrintspel", "Follow The Yarn", "Minnow Tarring", "Dark Forest", "Lost At Sea", and others. None had closely resembled "Forward Thinking Enterprises". He had only succeeded in humiliating himself before a dozen or so receptionists.

He knew now how Gellarty had felt after she had spent all day running around the plaza in her high heels-- completely defeated and quite blank with fatigue.

Bunt got back in his car. He felt like hanging a flag from his antennae like hearses sometimes do, but was certainly too tired to buy one.

Chapter 4

Scott Krull and Veal Hamm sat down for a nice late lunch in the beautiful, modern, air conditioned restaurant, Plus et Plus. Veal had never had French food, but had always wanted to try it. Being here was like the first time she had seen a painting by Monet-- everything was plush and elegant, and people talked softly so you could hear their silverware tinkling while they ate.

Scott unfolded a napkin and put it in her lap, and proceeded to tell her about the silverware. One fork, he explained, was for salad, another for the entree. There was a special spoon for dessert.

Veal wanted to made a card for Scott telling him he was like a special spoon for dessert.

He was a handsome man. His forehead was powerful and square, and his nose sharp and somewhat Roman. His thin-lipped mouth revealed two rows of absolutely perfect teeth. Even as he ate, his teeth remained perfect and clean, as though he had somehow stopped time to brush

them and then started time again without anyone noticing.

He rarely sneezed, and when he did, it was into a silk handkerchief.

Scott said Veval had a nice outfit on, and was very pretty. He then enthralled her with a series of oratories, giving her a chance now and then to say wow or amazing.

Scott told Veval that the new money printed at the treasury had required certain forms of new technology to produce. Only certain people understood this technology, but the result was that a fine weave in the bills prevented counterfeiting. The Presidents' heads had been enlarged in order to honor them-- basically a patriotic maneuver.

Scott talked about how most of history was irrelevant except for certain things we had learned lessons from-- about the expertise of General Sherman and his drive to the sea, the genius of Henry Ford, the way America had beaten the Soviet Union in the space race and claimed the moon, and the way Germany should have taken more supplies when they invaded Russia.

Scott ate the way he talked-- smoothly. He put some food on his spoon, seeming to scoop it rather than fork it-- and slid it between his perfect teeth. Veval felt like she was feeding him, she got so much out of watching him eat. She also tried to scoop up food with her fork, and had to resort to circumspectly stabbing it as usual.

Scott had several courses and finished each and every one entirely. He drank three glasses on white wine and left behind nary a drop nor a lip print. He kept talking and Veval kept listening, and he promised her an excellent dessert.

Scott whispered to the waiter, and a few minutes later he brought Veval a syrup-coated peach with a chocolate wafer rolled into a stick. Veval stared at the dessert with amazement. She had never had such a fine treat! He was treating her like a Rockefeller.

Scott watched her with his cool blue eyes as she nibbled on the chocolate wafer, and then spooned the peach to her bite after bite, cleanly spooning the peach onto his silverware and snapping the thin skin with a turn of the wrist.

In ten minutes she had finished what would have cost here about 3 days pay in dessert, and she thought she was falling in love.

While Bunt massaged his feet, trying to recover from his search, Scott Krull was conquering another victim. Of course, few knew-- the Veval Hamm affair was private so far. Bunt had no bead on Turner-- he wanted one, but had no way of knowing about Veval.

This case was like a baseball game with no hits past infield. Disturbingly anti-climactic.

Bunt thought it was time to look into Duffy's reports. The cops were really his best friend so

far. He had to get a handle on this case.

He called the first woman who Duffy had talked to.

The first woman, Catty Fields, said Turner had approached her unexpectedly. He had asked her some questions, and tried to get her phone number. Turner showed her no I.D. other than his business card-- "Forward Thinking Enterprises", just like he did to Gellarty. She was interested in pursuing something with Turner, mainly because he seemed to be rich, and suggested to her that he would be getting richer.

Catty said she wouldn't feel the same about a Turner without a beard. He would look so much smoother and more boyish.

Bunt thought Catty seemed nice. He asked her about Turner's car.

She said it was a big white sedan that stuck out pretty much everywhere it was so shiny. Bunt asked her if it was a Cadillac-- she said that yes, it was.

Out of the blue, Catty asked Bunt for his phone number.

Police complainants, especially complainants who had had problems with men, rarely asked cops or detectives out. It was far out, that idea. Like expecting to find a parking spot at Neiman Marcus in L.A. , it just didn't happen that often.

Bunt apologized as gracefully as possible, and explained that his car didn't work well enough for him to date her because there was a crack in the oil pan that didn't allow him to drive up and down steep hills. He told Catty he knew she lived in Serendipity Harbor, but he wouldn't be able to make it there without a better car.

Catty said Bunt was one honest detective, but he would never solve this case.

Turner was too smooth. He was too relentless. He had wooed her quite convincingly, and had proposed to her within two months. Then, he had left-- without a trace. This guy was too good at what he did to be caught-- but she did offer him one bit of advice.

Try cross-dressing and walking along a major San Francisco street.

To Bunt Turner was starting to seem like an anomaly of sorts-- like a bottle of wine at a basketball game, that turned out also to be incredibly cheap.

Bunt called the second woman who Duffy had talked to.

The second woman was named Wendy Jett.

Bunt asked Wendy if what she knew about Scott Turner.

She said he looked just like the description in the complaint she had filed.

He asked her if he had proposed to her.

She said that was ancient history. He had come and gone, and she'd never see him again. She knew she wouldn't.

Bunt felt frustrated. He gazed out of his window at the clear blue sky, for a moment at a loss.

He asked her if there was anything she hadn't told the police.

She said she couldn't remember, and she didn't want to try.

Bunt didn't harass Wendy any further. It clearly would have been in vain. He wondered if Scott Turner and Wendy weren't related somehow. He just couldn't get a thing she said to lead anywhere.

Bunt called the third woman. He didn't want to give up, no matter how frustrated he got.

The third woman's name was Phoebe Hack. She lived in an apartment out by the Pacific. Apparently Turner had approached her during a work luncheon. She was paying her bill, and he said hello and gave her his business card. He had taken her out on about 10 dates, all to nice, expensive restaurants, and then had proposed to her. He had then disappeared. She said that in all her memory he had been the closest she had met to being a perfect man, and life was boring and empty without him.

She had no other helpful details to relate.

Bunt called the fourth woman. The phone rang 6 times, and then she finally picked up. Her name was Helen West. She said that Turner was such a smooth guy he had made her want to just float away with him to some far away place. She said he was clean shaven, pale skinned, and blond haired. He always wore light- or white- colored suits with pastel ties. He seemed to know about everything-- art, history, cars, culture-- but he really loved to talk with her about business. He had all kinds of ideas about streamlining San Francisco's industrial district and making it into a kind of residential and corporate mixture, where people would live above their employers and just take an elevator or walk a few blocks to their jobs, for example. She said he was a kind of clean-shaven version of Roark, Ayn Rand's leading man in The Fountainhead.

When Bunt was finished talking to Helen West, he felt that he knew Turner a little better. He was a visionary type-- he had dreams about making the future more convenient. He wanted people to be able to go about their lives more easily-- as if in some sort of perfect flow motion.

Bunt called the fifth woman. She didn't answer.

He lay down on his couch and took a nap-- he had had a tiring day.

Bunt had a dream, the kind of dream you can't remember when you wake up. He was playing football in a crowded stadium. The cheerleaders looked like normal women you could meet anywhere, and one of them was Gellarty. The referee blew a whistle, and Bunt looked up-- it was Rose. Rose started running towards the sideline. A thin, wiry football player suddenly knocked her on her feet and ran towards the end zone while the crowd cheered boisterously-- louder and louder. He went up to Rose to see if she was all right. She was dead-- her neck was broken, and her forehead and face tilted forward as though they had tried to fly off of her body.

The telephone woke Bunt up. He felt disturbed, but could not remember why. It was one of Turner's victims-- woman number five. Apparently, the message he had left on her machine had convinced her to call.

The woman's name was Katie Smith. She said Turner had picked up about 2 AM one night on her way home from a dance club. She had been very tired, and he seemed to psychically sense this. She said he was always giving her what she wanted, and just when she needed it.

Smith said it was like having your id become a genie, dating Turner. If you were hungry, he would almost always call, and take you out to a restaurant-- and a nice one, too. If you were bored, he would take you out dancing. He even bought her ecstasy once, which gave her a big thrill. She asked Bunt not to bust him for it, because she didn't think he was involved with drugs in any major way.

Katie Smith seemed like an intelligent woman, and, once again, Bunt could see how Turner might have appealed to her. Bunt thought about Rose, and all the ways her genie-like attributes could have helped him live a more pleasurable life. But she had broken off their engagement-- just when things seemed to be getting good. Probably to go find someone like Turner to sleep with.

Bunt asked Smith a series of questions. He was especially interested in Turner's claim-- the one Gellarty had told Bunt about-- that Turner had worked at "Forward Thinking Enterprises", which, he had claimed, was in a particular industrial plaza in San Francisco-- probably the one he had searched.

Smith had a lead for Bunt. She said that "Forward Thinking Enterprises" was now called "Labyrintspel". Bunt's hair almost stood on end, he was so surprised and pleased. He remembered seeing "Labyrintspel"-- it was in one of the buildings he had investigated at the office park.

Bunt asked Smith if she knew anything else that might help him find Turner. She said Turner claimed to have a degree in history and had studied from modern days all the way back to Ancient Greece. She said he had talked about ancient Roman and Etruscan apartments and how similar they were to luxury apartments nowadays, only better because you had a huge entryway

with a pool and you could walk to the market. Turner had said everything was convenient about apartment life back then. Smith said Turner was always talking about business and lifestyle and things like that.

Bunt asked her if she knew where Turner had studied, and she said he wouldn't say. He had told her life was his classroom. He must have studied somewhere that had a good history program, thought Bunt, because you don't just dredge up details like that 15 years after graduation unless you are well-taught.

Smith went on to list some inventions Turner liked to talk about, like the first American rocket, and the superhighway, and the Japanese high speed train, and so on. She shifted gears suddenly and discussed Japanese big business and the structure of power there and how that was a template, according to Turner, that America ought to apply to its businesses.

Bunt felt like he was listening to a very nice, very long-winded college professor, who didn't know he had to take a crap. He knew a little more about "Forward Thinking Enterprises" now (or "Labyrintspel"), and he was trying to think of a way to get Smith to stop talking about Turner's ideas. She just kept going on and on and Bunt was losing track of it all. He was pretty sure history lessons wouldn't help Bunt find Turner.

Finally Bunt managed to cut in. He said, somewhat awkwardly, that he had to go close his window because it was raining, and told Smith thanks and he would call her back if he needed anything.

It actually was raining in San Francisco, so Bunt wasn't too upset about using that excuse to get off the phone with Smith.

Bunt went in the bathroom to take a leak. A sudden bolt of lightning hit close enough outside to make everything, including Bunt's reflection, look harsh and white. It was like a cop light had suddenly lit up the inside of his car from five feet away. Bunt zipped up his pants and got an umbrella.

Bunt said hello to the receptionist at Labyrintspel's building. She asked him if anyone expected him there. He said no, but he had an urgent matter to discuss with several employees. The receptionist said that no one was allowed to go to the floor Labyrintspel was on unless they were expected.

Bunt said, how could they expect him when they hadn't met him yet, and he wasn't buying anything, anyway?

The receptionist said that was just not the policy. She looked a little sorry for him, but wouldn't buzz him up.

A lot of people thought Bunt wasn't the kind of guy who could succeed at anything. His

friends in college always said Bunt was starting things and never finishing them. But he had graduated from college, and he had made love to Rose, and he had solved over thirty cases.

Bunt walked up to the elevator, trying to get find some opening that would let him get up to Turner's old employer. The elevator didn't open when he pressed "4". He looked more closely at the elevator controls-- and saw that a pass was required to open the doors.

Bunt looked at the space between the two elevator doors. He wanted to pry the doors open and force his way into the elevator. If he did, he paused, thinking-- the elevator might not be on his floor, so he might just fall down into the basement and break his leg.

Bunt went back to the receptionist's desk. He looked up at her. She was on the telephone, talking about someone's meeting. There was a pass right in front of him on the table. She was hardly looking at Bunt while she was on the phone. She could have even been talking to one of Turner's fellow employees. All he had to do was nab the pass, and he could be where the person on the other end of the line was.

Just then, the receptionist looked at him. She looked annoyed. She finished her phone call, and asked Bunt how she could help him-- obviously trying to sound just the way she did when she first spoke with him.

He said he needed a pass for the elevator.

The receptionist said only those who had already been hired by the landlord or by one of the building's businesses could have an elevator pass.

Bunt asked if he could apply for a pass.

She said, you could apply, actually, by getting a job at one of the offices in the building.

Bunt asked if there were any openings she knew about.

She said she was pretty sure that none of the other 11 businesses were hiring, and that Labyrinth never told her, because they hired through some professional placement agency in Los Angeles.

She said that the landlord did have one job opening that he could apply for.

A security guard.

Bunt thought he could do that kind of work. If Duffy could help find Turner, then Bunt could question a few businesspeople now and then about what they were doing. He even had practiced a tough look that had worked in several previous cases.

He took an application and filled it out right at the desk, while the receptionist looked on,

seeming somewhat taken aback.

Bunt went home. He called Gellarty. He wasted no time telling her that he was investigating a potential job Turner once had had, and thought he might meet an associate of his there. He said it would take a week or so to really make any progress.

Gellarty said she had had a dream where she had been with Scott again, but, when she woke up, he was, of course, not there. Only his card in her wallet.

Bunt asked her if he had had any associates. She said he hadn't told her about any. Past girlfriends or wives? Again, she did not know. She was starting to sound a little upset.

Bunt wanted to ask her if she had had many previous boyfriends. She was beautiful-- like Rose only West Coast Gothic.

Bunt told Gellarty not to go near the industrial plaza and to avoid anything that reminded her of Turner.

Bunt said he would find Turner. He really thought he would.

Bunt called the office building where Labyrintspel was located the next morning. The receptionist didn't remember him at first. He reminded her of the general thread of their conversation, and she said to call back at noon.

Bunt was having bad spell. He really wanted to take the bull by its horns, but couldn't seem to find the bull. He went into the bathroom. He looked in the mirror.

His eyes looked red. It's funny how, when you really want something, it doesn't matter how much sleep you get-- or don't get.

Bunt had once had a case that he rarely spoke of. An internal affairs officer had been busting cops right and left for taking bribes and consorting with prostitutes. One of the cops that had gotten busted said he thought the IA officer was up to something. Bunt was reminded of a movie just like that one starring Richard Gere.

It turns out that the job required Bunt to go on stakeout. He had spent two nights sleepless in his car before he finally saw the IA officer leave his home at a strange hour.

The officer had taken him for a wild trip down highways, alleys, main streets, and, even, through parking lots.

It had turned out that the IA man had just been going for a ride.

Bunt had wanted to bust him so badly that he had consumed 11 cups of 7-11 coffee, larges, in

two nights. He didn't even feel it until the day after the chase, when, suddenly, he had become aware of a buzzing in his head, and a very powerful medicated feeling. He had collapsed on his couch and slept for 20 hours.

The IA case was one he never solved, and he often criticized himself when he thought about it. It was one of his few failures in the detective business. Somehow the IA cop had been better than Bunt.

Maybe all IA cops were.

Bunt thought anxiously about the security guard job, and felt, indeed, that his cover was good, and that he had a good chance to track down Turner at Labyrintspel. He just had to wait until noon.

Bunt looked at his sink. There was a comb, a toothpaste, and a toothbrush. He looked at the comb, the toothpaste, and the toothbrush. Over and over again.

Bunt called the office building again. The receptionist said he should come in around 1 PM for an interview-- with Will Peters, the building manager. Bunt asked the receptionist if he would be getting access to the whole building for his patrols. She said-- only if Mr. Peters took him on as a security guard.

Bunt was wishing he had bought those black shoes like the ones his father used to wear. He had a pair of loafers that were semi-formal, and a white shirt that barely fit (it was really a little too tight.) He put them on.

Bunt felt like he was going to his first job interview ever. When he was fourteen, he had worked as a caddy at a golf course near where his parents lived.

Bunt had been sweating heavily, just like he was now, and also seemed to have suffered from some form of short term memory loss. He had told the golf course manager that he didn't go to school because in the heat of the moment he thought the man would want him to have more time available to work. He also had called him "Chief". For Perry at the Daily Planet, "Chief" was too formal. For a golf course manager in the 1980's, it was too casual.

He had gotten the job anyway, and spent most of the summer following golfers around and looking over the rolling hills at the horizon. It was a pretty posh place with many nice views for people who took the time to let their eyes wander. And lots of time to kill.

Bunt showed up at the office building thirty minutes early. He asked the receptionist if Mr. Peters was ready for him. She said he would have to wait.

Bunt sat down in a lobby chair, and looked for something to read. All they had were old U.S. News and World Reports, and one People magazine. Bunt picked up the People. He didn't think

he would have been able to remember any of the news he would have been reading at that time. He found himself looking at a picture of Linda Evans, who was planning to disown one of her children. She looked very calm and very pretty. He felt like his stress was somehow going to make her forehead collapse with its intensity-- but she kept looking at the camera, apparently quite at peace.

The buzzer sounded at the receptionist's desk, and the receptionist asked Bunt to go past her desk, down 3 halls, left, then right, then right again, to Mr. Peters' office.

Bunt was not an idiot. He had solved many cases in his day. But he was feeling jittery. He took two left turns, and realized his mistake when he ended up at a locked building exit. He tried to retrace his steps, and finally found Mr. Peters' office-- which was behind a metal door sporting a wooden plate with his name on it. Bunt hoped he would get the job, because he felt closer to getting into Labyrintspel every minute.

Mr. Peters asked Bunt to have a seat. The chair was too far away from the desk for Bunt, but he was afraid to move it closer. If he had looked straight ahead, Bunt would have been looking at the wall. He had to crane his neck to look at Mr. Peters, and this made his head shake. Bunt wondered if Mr. Peters could tell his head was shaking.

Bunt said he was glad to meet Mr. Peters. He looked his potential employer hopefully in the eyes, and as he finished his sentence, he experienced a shudder of tension that seemed to erupt from his spine and up his neck; it caused his head to tremble more violently.

Mr. Peters said hello somewhat briskly. He looked down at Bunt's application. He held his brown suit sleeve firmly along the edge of his desk, and, at his wrist, Bunt counted two buttons, and was about to count "three" to himself when his nerves made him stop.

Mr. Peters said that he saw that Bunt had a college degree.

Bunt said that he had an M.A..

Mr. Peters said that security guards didn't need to have college degrees, and, in fact, this tended to make them overqualified.

Bunt tensed his forehead. He resisted the urge to rub it in order to calm it. Why would a college degree prevent someone from getting a job? A Masters Degree could really only help someone in terms of literacy and communication skills. Some employers, concluded Bunt, apparently look poorly on many years of extended study of several score books from the West, the East, the Mid-East, and darned near everywhere, and 50 plus papers written each to a degree of complexity suitable to convince a T.A. that the Professor would have agreed with his or her giving you something between a C-plus to an A-plus.

Bunt wondered if he should apologize for having a college degree. Before he could say anything, Mr. Peters said that he could see that Bunt had been involved with detective work.

Mr. Peters asked, without warning, what had made him quit?

Bunt was about to say that he wasn't making enough money as a detective, but he could almost picture a golf ball flying past the window, and him saying something like that he didn't go to school, no. Instead, Bunt explained he had passed his detective business on to someone else who wanted to do that kind of thing-- and again looked Mr. Peters in the eyes.

Mr. Peters asked Bunt if he had had any work since quitting as a detective. Bunt said he had been pursuing a relationship with a woman, and had reached a point where to get past dating he would have to get a career.

Mr. Peters said that he saw that Bunt had a personal reference. He asked if he could call Officer Duffy.

Bunt felt a flash of panic. If Mr. Peters called Duffy, Duffy might tell Peters that Bunt was still a detective. He didn't want to seem to still be doing detective work. Worse, he might tell Peters his real name-- and Bunt hadn't warned Duffy not to.

Bunt said that he could always do that, but that the San Francisco Police were very busy, and he might have a hard time getting through. He said Officer Duffy was a friend of his from way back who had helped him with some of his cases by advising him as to the legality of his investigations.

Mr. Peters looked concerned. So, he said-- this woman you are seeing wants you to get a job so you can get engaged? Would you have pursued a job otherwise?

Bunt said that the nature of their relationship had really inspired him to get work. He wanted to outdo her previous boyfriend, who had been very successful. Bunt said hastily that he was not, however, by nature a lazy man, and had solved many cases.

Mr. Peters said it was kind of a strange thing for a man to get a job just to get on good terms with a woman. He looked at him for a moment as though he did not believe him, and then nodded slightly, and said, then again, it wasn't the strangest thing he had ever heard.

Mr. Peters asked Bunt why he had applied for a job at this particular building.

Bunt said that his girlfriend had always wanted him to get a job in Los Angeles, and that this Industrial Plaza was the closest thing. He had stopped by most of the buildings in the plaza, and the receptionist here was the only one who seemed to be able to help him.

Mr. Peters smiled thinly, and said, she's a nice woman, isn't she.

Bunt said she seemed very loyal.

Mr. Peters seemed about to say something conclusive, but then looked pensive. He asked Bunt why he had wanted to talk to the people at Labyrinthspel.

Bunt said, somewhat shaken, that he had wanted to apply for a job there, but didn't realize they only hired out of Los Angeles. Bunt said he would have preferred to work as a security guard, and that the name "Labyrinthspel" was known to him from a missing person's case he had worked on. He had just wanted to give them a try.

Mr. Peters said that there was no way he could obtain a security pass unless he was employed by one of the businesses in the office building, or by Mr. Peters himself.

Bunt felt a burst of joy. Mr. Peters seemed to be saying that Bunt would soon be one of those employees.

A cloud outside the office window moved past the sun, and the room filled with sunlight for a moment. Bunt's hand, on the edge of his chair, was lit up white, as though bleached by the sun. Then a cloud covered the sun once again.

Mr. Peters thanked Bunt for coming to the interview, and said he would think about his application. He said he would call Bunt as soon as he had made a decision.

Bunt tried not to show his frustration. He almost forgot to shake Peters' hand before leaving, but he thought about chasing golf balls, and then about what his father would have said, and he walked up to Mr. Peters and shook his hand.

Please do give a call, said Bunt.

He left Mr. Peters' office.

Bunt walked past the receptionist as if in a daze. He didn't know if he should be able to remember her name, and just said goodbye and thanks without checking his pace. The receptionist said something polite in a cool monotone. Bunt passed the sign that said, "4B Labyrinthspel".

This was crucially important, getting this job.

Suddenly time seemed to freeze, and Bunt felt himself at a sort of a combination déjà vu and a crux-- he had been in this spot before, where circumstances could determine whether he was to be an insider or an outsider in society. His SAT tests, and the first few bubbles he had woodenly filled out, in a daze as to whether he could finish in time. His college interview, and the fruity, nervous feeling he had had about his entrance essay. The first time he had asked Rose for a date, and had seemed to be in a whirling mental and emotional confusion, not knowing whether to predict victory or defeat.

He thought about his first case, and how this woman's husband had been trying to claim that their pre-nuptial agreement had been lost-- it had been so easy, then-- just a few phone calls, and a quick search for a copy of the papers. He remembered the IA case, and the two nights of sleeplessness, and 11 cups of coffee, and the huge, needless, chase. He thought about his crummy desk at the office-- his clock, his envelope holder, and his pen.

He thought, finally, of Gellarty, and her distant gaze, as though she had lost something and thought she would find it somewhere far away.

Bunt went back to the receptionist's desk-- his somewhat portly shadow growing longer as he got closer to her.

He asked her name.

She said her name was Mrs. Fram. He said his name was Bunt Smith, and that he was glad to meet her. He said, simply, that he hoped to see her again soon. Mrs. Fram said, yes, maybe-- and good luck.

Bunt paused for a moment, on the balls of his feet, and left the office building.

Bunt called Gellarty. She took a long time to answer. She said she had been watching a television show, and the volume had been turned up too high.

Bunt was somewhat befuddled. He was closer now to finding Turner's trail, but everything now depended on another man-- Mr. Peters.

He told Gellarty that his lead looked a little sketchy now, but that someone might be helping him out.

She paused for a moment, not seeming very interested.

Bunt said he thought he knew where Turner used to work, and he was going to try to ask some people there if they knew him.

Gellarty said good luck-- and that he better try his best, because only Turner and she knew Turner, and he would have to be pretty good to catch that smoothie.

Bunt felt a little depressed, but thanked her, and said he would keep her informed about the Turner case. He hung up the phone.

He had to stay off the phone now in order to wait for Mr. Peters to call.

Mr. Peters didn't call that day, and he didn't call the next day, either. When Bunt tried to reach him by calling the building, he wasn't available. Bunt had asked the receptionist if she

knew anything about Mr. Peters' decision, but she said that Mr. Peters was very quiet about his hiring and firing practices, and he never told anyone anything they did not need to know.

How could Bunt investigate the Labyrinthspel people if he couldn't even get into their office? He didn't really want to be a security guard for its own sake-- just to find Turner for Gellarty. He didn't relish the idea of standing around all day asking random people who probably wouldn't steal their neighbor's paper if they had a pass for a particular part of a building.

If Gellarty had seen him, she probably would have said that he was slacking, and didn't care about the case. But Bunt had been very anxious about the job-- it was his best lead yet. The first day, in particular, he had been very tense, and had even gone to the office late that evening, where he sat with his silent phone and looked at his clock, his letter opener, and his ballpoint pen.

The second day he lost a little of his intensity, and by the third day, he was having trouble staying focused on his job opportunity. There was no straight path to Turner, it seemed. Probably someone knew him at Labyrinthspel, but he had to wait for Mr. Peters, and had really no way of making progress without getting hired.

Bunt had no good options. Really, he was forced to remain slack. He felt physically comfortable, with a cup of coffee or a soda nearby at all times, in his air-conditioned apartment. But he couldn't escape the eerie sensation that people would judge him to be making no progress of any kind, and would simply have deemed him lazy.

They just don't get my situation, thought Bunt, these imaginary people.

Bunt called Katie Smith late the second night. He thought he might like to hear more about Turner and his ideas. This was a little like flipping on the television to watch the Olympics-- there were all of these great performers jumping high hurdles and running 100 yard sprints in 6 seconds or so, and Bunt was just sitting there, watching, in his trousers and a tank top.

Ms. Smith got to talking immediately, and didn't stop for a long, long time. She said Turner had told her about the early Mid-Easterners, and how their mastabas, structures of stone, had looked like giant stairsteps from every angle, and how the Egyptians had changed that design, making it larger and smoother, so that the pyramids looked utterly smooth and, well, pyramidal, from far away. All of this was to praise the sun and to make sure that their pharaohs were prepared to be successful in the afterlife. Turner had said that most of them probably were. Turner had thought that the Egyptians were way ahead of their time, with better technology than most civilizations, and great ideas about how to immortalize their pharaohs. Turner's favorite Egyptian had been King Tut, who had moved the great capital, Cairo, to a better designed city somewhat to the south. It had been built at the crux of a mountain, with arms of the rock extending forward on both sides, enabling King Tut to protect the approach to the new capitol on all sides. You couldn't invade King Tut's city without its occupants seeing you.

Turner liked to talk about music. He claimed to know a lot about it. He said Beethoven was an

idiot who spent his whole life crying about one woman because he didn't have the courage to move on and find another one. He liked Wagner, though he thought that Nietzsche was right in claiming that the "Percival" symphony was the beginning of the end of his career, because it was too conventional and too Christian. He loved Mozart. He thought that Mozart was the greatest classical musician ever. Turner liked modern music, too-- he would have liked country, but couldn't stand Southern accents. He preferred adult contemporary music. He said that adult contemporary radio stations should avoid 60's music, though. He liked Falco and Olivia Newton John. Olivia Newton John was his favorite pop singer. He said that you should really see her in an interview-- she was just the greatest.

Turner thought it was a shame that musicians always ended up dying from drugs or alcohol. He couldn't understand why someone would want to lose their edge that way. He said that Buddy Holly hadn't taken drugs, and therefore he should still be alive.

The fifties he loved. Turner pointed out that what we think of as retro wasn't retro then. We got our first suburbs then, and had won a war-- in part through superior planning. He also admired Hitler's "Blitzkrieg" plan, and thought his architecture and PR strategies were very powerful, but that he just hadn't been able to make his plans for the distant future of Germany work. America had had enough men and technological firepower to win, and they did win.

Turner said the Nazi experiments were stupid-- human subjects could be found nowadays who were willing guinea pigs-- just pay them some money, and they will show up with a smock on ready to be cut into pieces and put back together again. He thought, though, that space exploration was really the best aspect of modern science-- he predicted a lot of discoveries could be made in space, especially concerning new types of metals, elements, and microchips.

Smith said that talking to Turner was like watching a space shuttle launch-- there was a some heat, a gout of smoke, and then everything just took off at a huge speed.

Bunt was interested in some of these ideas. He didn't know much about King Tut, and had thought he was just another pharaoh. He had heard about Hitler's loss in World War II, of course, but didn't know about his architectural innovations. Also, he hadn't heard much about experiments in space concerning new metals. He had the immediate and somewhat irrational urge to invest in a metallurgy company so his stocks would soar when a new metal was discovered.

Bunt decided to get off of the telephone. He thanked Katie Smith for her time (he had to interrupt her again to do so), and hung up.

He sat on his couch. He felt like a real loser for some reason. All of his failures-- Rose, the IA case, and others. . . all of them seemed to wash over him in an intense wave of failure.

If Bunt got Turner, wouldn't Gellarty try to marry him? Bunt would have to kiss her goodbye. A goodbye kiss that would earn him \$5000. Was it worth it?

What if Bunt gave up on the case? He could even lie to Gellarty and say they had found Turner dead or something. Then he could pocket the money, invest in some metallurgy stock, buy a new car and elope with Gellarty. But, then, Bunt and Gellarty might run into Turner someday. Or, he might even become famous. He could just see him and Gellarty sitting in some nice couch in a Los Angeles apartment when-- suddenly-- Scott Turner comes on the television talking about his big idea for a new Modern Art building. Gellarty would run out of there faster than light speed, and she wouldn't come back, either.

Bunt thought about that movie with Kevin Kostner, where he had been hired to protect Whitney Houston. They had fallen in love, because she had needed his help, and he had really turned out to be a great provider with an exciting secret life. Near the end of the movie, Kostner had taken a bullet for Houston. . . and when he left town in a plane, she came to see him off, and almost wanted to go off with him to wherever he was going to go.

What a fantasy! A pretty woman-- you impressed her with your commanding talents and skills, got her to fall in love with you, and even saved her life. She became like a devoted pet. Of course, the bullet you took for her would have been worth the pain. It would make you pass out, and then groan a little but only later, conveniently, when she visited you in the hospital.

Bunt went into the bathroom and looked into the mirror. He didn't look so hot. His hair was covered in white flecks of dandruff. His t-shirt was too small for his body and seemed to stretch in an almost made-for-women way at his pecs and armpits. He tried to squint his eyes. Sometimes, in the evening light, with his eyes almost shut, he thought he looked like Christopher Reeves again in the mirror. Like a dark and handsome man.

He couldn't seem to fool himself this time.

Mr. Peters called early the next morning. Bunt heard the phone and jumped out of bed, almost hitting his head on the lamp, which threw an arc of bright light against the opposite wall. Bunt immediately felt a little out of it, as though he was watching himself getting a bypass operation on TV..

Bunt said hello to Mr. Peters, and then cleared his throat. It seemed to take a long time, but Mr. Peters said hello back. Mr. Peters gave a short but friendly speech, and said that he would hire Bunt for the position of a security guard. Bunt resisted the urge to collapse into himself in a happy dreamy way, and said thanks. Thanks Mr. Peters!

Mr. Peters started giving Bunt some details-- where to get his uniform, how to charge it to the landlord company, when to come into work, and where to pick up his patrol pattern sheets and duty sheets.

The sun shone in powerfully through the window. Bunt felt its beautiful heat on his shoulders and back. He said thanks once more to Mr. Peters, and affirmed, quite powerfully, that he would be there the next day at 8:30 AM with his uniform on.

Bunt called Gellarty.

He started yammering at her in his excitement. She asked him to slow down, please. She couldn't understand anything he was saying.

Bunt heard the air whispering between her always parted teeth. He pictured the part in her hair, her calm forehead, and just pretty much all of her looking really nice.

He told her he was getting a new outfit-- a uniform.

She said that was great. Did that have anything to do with Turner?

Definitely with Turner, said Bunt. He was going to take a job in the building where he used to work-- as a security guard.

Gellarty sounded excited. She wished him good luck.

Bunt said that he was closer now to Turner than ever.

He hung up the phone.

Bunt went to the shopping mall Mr. Peters had asked him to go to and purchased a security guard's uniform. It only cost him \$80 of his remaining \$580 or so. The uniform was navy blue, with neo-military starched lines and slacks with a yellow stripe down both sides. This was the kind of outfit you would hate to wear at first, but might get used to after awhile. Like a dress shirt that itches, but feels like tossed cotton after an hour or so.

Chapter 5

Bunt went home. He put the outfit on, and looked at himself in the mirror. They always said that women loved men in uniform, and he could see why. . . the shirt and the striped slacks fit together in such a way that Bunt's belly seemed smaller. The epaulettes at his shoulders made him look sharper. In general, everything about the outfit looked neat and snappy. Bunt was proud of how he looked. He turned the bathroom light on full bright until the buttons on his shirt reflected white flashes, and practiced his mean look. He tightened his forehead, gritted his teeth, and made his eyes protrude a little, like they were prying into someone's thoughts, and were certain to find whatever crime lurked there.

He wondered how Gellarty would feel about his new outfit. He figured Turner's clothes fit him this well no matter what he was wearing. How was it that he was such a charmer, though, really? Was it the car? Could he actually have been genuinely nice to the women he swindled?

Bunt looked at himself in the mirror again. He looked fearsome. He looked like he could

really scare somebody. Gellarty would have been impressed, he thought.

Bunt took off his uniform and went to bed. He couldn't resist an urge to punch his pillow smartly as he prepared to lie down-- it was almost as if he had become possessed by some military spirit that made him want to walk in straight lines and turn in perfect 90 degree angles. Maybe this was how people in boot camp resisted all the pain and exhaustion they experienced there and learned to love the military.

Bunt thought about famous military people. Basically, you had your MacArthurs, and you had your John Wayne as Patton types, he figured. John Wayne would have swaggered around his camp, with the strip on his helmet hanging loose, talking to his regiment in a drawling, familiar way. Tighten up there, Private, before the biscuit you ate for lunch makes your belt disappear, and so on. He would have made jokes like that, and everyone would have loved him, and no-one would have minded when he ate the best cut of steak every Friday night.

But, could he have won a war?

MacArthur could have. He would have been a model of puissance and virtue-- he would have trained his troops in a strict and disciplined manner, without humor, and with his eyes fixed always on the horizon-- he was a real military visionary. If the Geneva Convention said not to abuse prisoners of war, and the enemy was doing it, he would have invented his own convention and abused them anyway. When MacArthur and his regiment were done, there, quite simply, would be no enemy troops left. Only Americans-- grim, disciplined, American supermen who would come home after the war and take over industries and run marathons.

They would be the kind of men whose muscles and sinews seemed to be fused to their bones, with no fat showing at all. Nothing would shake or shimmy when these men jumped-- instead, everything about them would pulse and clench. They would be able to predict the weather better than weathermen, and charm women with their sheer, glib ways.

Wayne's men would have returned home with their original accents intact, and a perfect familiarity with their mothers and their childhood bedrooms.

MacArthur's men would return as if each was the same man-- frightening, awesome, essences of masculinity and efficiency-- too damn good at everything to be pitied.

What happened to a man when he served under a MacArthur or a Sherman or even a Rommel? Did a part of his spirit die? Or was it just that his baby fat got trimmed? Maybe his fat was replaced with worldly knowledge and superhuman ability. A man who had not been to war, for example, might appear simply to be sitting somewhere-- on a couch, maybe-- seeming to be himself and him, in his house-clothes, and praising his household gods. A man who had been to war would always be in motion, even when sitting. You might sense that you were chasing a ghost if you watched him-- like Space Ghost or Wonder Woman's invisible airplane, you expected to see something where you knew it ought to be, but found to your surprise that it had already flown miles beyond its expected location.

Bunt began to dream-- he was the prosecuting attorney, representing the Navy, in a court martial hearing. A sea captain's crew had mutinied. The captain claimed that they had breached authority for no reason. The captain's crew said that the captain had punished them very frequently for strange and trivial things. The cook had been made to sit in confinement for 3 days because he had failed to produce fresh strawberries one morning. One man was forced to clean the entire surface of the ship, in very long shifts, because he had missed cleaning a small portion of his own vomit from the side of the ship after a few miles on a turbulent sea.

Bunt knew he could win the case. The captain was obviously insane, and it was right for his crew to mutiny. He unbuttoned his jacket and approached the captain in order to question him. Bunt's confidence began to collapse almost immediately. The captain explained that he and the crew had been patrolling potentially hostile waters at the time of the mutiny, and that strict discipline had to be maintained at all times. He said that the sailor who had vomited had been drinking whiskey in untoward amounts and against orders. He explained that, in terms of the strawberries, he just liked them.

A high ranking Naval officer then defended the captain. He explained that the captain had an outstanding record, and had served admirably in World War II, pioneering a new patrolling pattern that had enabled him to sink 5 U-Boats.

The court ruled that the captain was sane and competent, and that the entire crew of the ship, aside from the captain, was to be dishonorably discharged. Also, Bunt was to be stripped of his station and left to his own devices. . .

The alarm sounded, and Bunt woke up.

Bunt took a shower, put on his uniform, and ate breakfast. He thought that maybe he had been dreaming, and remembered something about a courtroom and strawberries. He tried to shake of the residue of the dream.

Bunt headed for the office building. When he pulled into its parking lot, he tried to look up at the fourth floor. If he strained his neck, he could make it out through the corner of his eye. He figured he would get access to Labyrintspel later that day, after he had memorized his duty sheets and patrol patterns, and the UPS men had come and gone.

Bunt knocked on Mr. Peters' door. Mr. Peters' told him to come right on in. Bunt said hello, and that he was looking forward to his first day on the job. Mr. Peters' looked at him from behind his glasses for a moment, and seemed to be studying him. He said the uniform looked nice on Bunt. He emphasized that the tight lines of the uniform's shirt and slacks would loosen and become soft if he didn't send his uniform to the cleaners once a week.

Bunt said that he would, though he was secretly not planning to do anything of the kind. The uniform would be starched enough and snappy enough for the short time it would take to investigate Labyrintspel. Then he would put it in his closet for possible use in future cases.

Mr. Peters gave Bunt his patrol sheet. He explained that Bunt was to start on the first floor, and was to walk down every hallway in a surprisingly complex pattern, pausing at each external doorway and each stairwell doorway for several minutes, in case anyone was trying to sneak in or out of the building using the stairs or the first floor exits, or had gotten trapped in a stairwell. He was then to patrol the second, third and fourth floors, checking everyone's ID passes that he came across. Each floor had its own distinct patrol pattern.

Bunt tried not to sound disappointed when he saw that Labyrintspel was located in the second to last area he was supposed to patrol. He asked Mr. Peters if he could keep the patrol pattern sheets, and Mr. Peters said that he was allowed to keep the sheets for his first day only. Mr. Peters added that he would be checking around the building from time to time just to make sure that Bunt was doing things the way he was told to do them.

Mr. Peters then handed Bunt his duties sheet. He was supposed to, essentially, keep his patrol-- he was to continue patrolling every day from 9 AM to 5 PM with one 30 minute break for lunch at 2 PM (after everyone else had left for lunch and come back), and 2 15 minute breaks at 10 AM and 3:30 PM, when he could sit down for a minute or have a snack or something. There were also some rules. Bunt was not supposed to engage in long conversations with the building's employees, spend too much time in the bathroom (i.e. read a newspaper in the pot or such), or enter any of the building's business offices unless he had been told to do so or unless he strongly suspected that some form of foul play was afoot.

Mr. Peters asked Bunt if he thought the rules seemed workable. Bunt said they were O.K. and he would have no problem following them. Mr. Peters said, all right then, Mr. Smith-- get patrolling!

Bunt left Mr. Peters' office. He thought that the rules seemed easy enough to follow. In fact, the whole thing seemed like a piece of cake-- he could relax now. He looked up. At the corner of one of the halls, near an exit, was a video camera. There was a small red light blinking near where it was attached to the wall.

Bunt tensed up. It seemed as though, in fact, Bunt would be monitored by Mr. Peters quite thoroughly-- or, at least, that he could look through the security tapes afterwards if he suspected that Bunt had been up to anything.

The way that people behave in front of cameras is really bizarre, thought Bunt. They stand, walk and sit in a particular way, as though the person watching them would want to hire them to be in some kind of fashion magazine or something. Also, they usually either began to speak really loudly and clearly, or to mutter very quietly. Bunt thought about a television show he had seen, where people who had done stupid things at work had been caught on camera. Most of them were of people having sex in a restaurant's kitchen, or something. Sometimes, however, people were caught stealing money, or going into their boss's office and looking through his desk.

Bunt didn't want to get caught on camera doing anything stupid. Also, he had to stay employed for at least a little while, until he had had a chance to talk to some of the employees of Labyrintspel. Of course, he knew, as well, that he wasn't supposed to go into any of the offices unless he had been told to do so-- or, and this was his golden ticket-- *unless he strongly suspected that something was afoot.*

Bunt continued to patrol the building for the rest of his first hour. At 10 AM, he exited the rear of the building, using his security pass in order to prevent an alarm from going off.

The fresh air was nice. An air-conditioned building was usually comfortable, but there was something more pleasant about "real" outside air. Bunt looked at the sky. The sun was part of the way to its noontime zenith, but was low enough to have been easily captured in a photograph-- which would have shown a horizon adorned with metal and glass buildings, and rolling hills crowded with smaller, red and brown houses and apartments, all showing long shadows.

Bunt walked over to a point along the building's wall that was between 2 windows. He opened his sport bag. He took out a package. He reached in his pocket and grabbed a small, spherical object. He flipped a switch on the object, and a small panel on its diameter turned green. He put the object in the package. He pulled some tape out of his bag, and taped up the box-- but only part of the way, so some of the space between the two top flaps was exposed-- showing a bunch of pink foam typical of such packages.

The package said:

Labyrintspel, Room 4B
Frisco Quad
395 Industrial Plaza
San Francisco, CA 86371

The return address said, simply:

Scott Turner

Bunt put the package back in his sports bag. He walked back inside the building.

Bunt had about 3 minutes left in his break. He paid a visit to Mrs. Fram. She waved hello to him-- she was talking on the phone-- probably to someone in the building who had been expecting a visitor or something.

Bunt waited a minute or so until she hung up the phone. He said hello to her, and asked, just out of curiosity, when the daily UPS delivery usually arrived at the building.

Mrs. Fram said that Fed Ex came at all hours, but that the main UPS delivery was at 11:30 AM every day. Mrs. Fram didn't even ask why Bunt wanted to know about the delivery. She had really warmed up to him now that he had been hired. Bunt felt a little sad that his hunt for Turner

was going to force him to quit his job very soon. Mrs. Fram would have been a good friend-- he could tell.

Bunt resumed his patrol. At about 11:15 he did something somewhat dutiful-- an employee of one of the second floor buildings had gotten stuck in one of the stairwells. He had heard him knocking on the stairwell door during his patrol. He checked the frazzled man's pass-- it cleared. He let the man into the second floor hallway.

At 11:30, Bunt made a point of locating himself directly in front of Labyrintspel. At that moment, nothing was going on. Bunt slowed his pace. He looked up at the hallway camera. He pretended to hear something-- inclining his head, and cupping his hand to his ear. He moved to the window at the end of the hallway, and sidestepped until he was almost directly beneath the camera.

Bunt was breathing hard, and sweating a little. He had about 30 seconds-- after that, he would have to move back into the camera's view. Otherwise, Mr. Peters might think something strange was going on-- either right away, or when and if he viewed the day's tape.

Bunt heard the elevator ding at 11:31. It was Mrs. Fram. She was carrying a big stack of boxes. He could hardly see her behind the stack, it was so tall. Bunt walked up to Mrs. Fram, and said, Here-- let me help you with those. He took three packages off of the top of her stack-- the ones addressed to Labyrintspel. Mrs. Fram smiled and thanked him, and started walking toward 4C.

Bunt walked towards 4B. About half of the way there, he pretended to drop the three packages. His sports bag, which had been previously unzipped, stealthily emitted a fourth package. Bunt picked up all four packages, and knocked on the door at 4B.

A receptionist answered his knock. She was much younger than Mrs. Fram. She seemed attractive, but Bunt didn't take much time looking at her. He said that here was their mail and explained that Mrs. Fram had been a little overloaded. He handed the receptionist four packages.

She thanked Bunt and briskly closed the door-- which then locked automatically.

Bunt had the key to that door, but, of course, if he used it for no reason, the camera would show Mr. Peters that he had been doing something that was against the rules.

Bunt starting patrolling the halls again. He had a few hours to kill before lunch.

Chapter 6

Bunt had a nice lunch break. He went outside again, and ate a sandwich in the shade, an occasional breeze cooling him. His hands shook a little while he ate, and he had to spit on a napkin to wipe some mustard off of his uniform shirt that he had grandpa'd. All things considered, he had a fine lunch.

After about another hour of patrolling, with no one stuck anywhere and very few people to question regarding their building passes, he had again timed things so that, at precisely 3:04 PM, he was in front of the door to Labyrintspel.

Everything was quiet, and no one was in the hall. The camera light beamed steady and red. Bunt was about to start walking again, muttering a curse under his breath, when a loud ruckus erupted from 4B.

Bunt tried to act surprised. He started, in fact, quite nicely, hopping a little to one side. He reached in his pocket and took out the universal building key that Mr. Peters had given him. While he was unlocking the door to 4B, a loud sound emerged from behind the door, and Bunt heard screams and shouted obscenities as the sprinkler system kicked on in Labyrintspel's office.

Bunt smiled to himself, then put on his tough face.

He walked into the office of Labyrintspel.

The lobby featured one large, wooden desk. A kind of broad hallway opened behind the receptionist's desk, which led to office doors opening to the East and the West. As the hallway extended to the North, Bunt could see that it branched into several "T"s, which led East and West again, then ended in a branch to the East.

All of the office doors were open, and most of them were occupied by at least one man or woman, dressed in a business suit, waving his or her arms and / or shouting as the sprinkler system steadily drenched their clothing.

The receptionist was tearing around madly, trying to figure out what had happened. Bunt caught her by her jacket sleeve, and pointed to the stack of packages near the opening to the large hallway. One of the packages emitted a thin stream of smoke.

Bunt shouted, above all the employees' screaming and cursing: Smoke bomb! False alarm! False alarm!

Bunt walked over to a panel near the packages and unlocked it with his universal key. He flipped the switch that said "SPR" on it. The sprinklers stopped jetting water immediately, and the employees cheered a little and began to quiet down.

The receptionist thanked Bunt. He said no problem, and that it was part of his job. He added

that he had been a private detective for many years before becoming a security guard.

Bunt went over to the pile of packages and picked up the package that the smoke had been coming from. The return address said, simply:

Scott Turner

Bunt asked the receptionist if she knew anyone named Scott Turner? She said she personally didn't, but that he should talk to Mr. Garde, in the last office to the left. She said, I hope you catch that Turner. Labyrintspel didn't need that kind of soaking-- not at all.

Bunt thanked her and walked down the hall. There were more branches and "T's" than he thought an office that size would have-- this was a little like a maze.

Bunt reached the last "T" and turned to the left. He walked up to the door that said "George Garde / Personnel." Bunt knocked on the door.

A medium tall man with a balding head showing the remains of a previously full head of blonde hair opened the door. He asked Bunt if he could help him. The man looked a little upset-- he was wringing water from his tie.

Bunt asked, are you Mr. Garde? The balding man said that yes, he was. He asked Bunt rather grimly if he was looking for a job.

Bunt said he wasn't-- he had another kind of question.

Mr. Garde said that that was good because Labyrintspel hired almost exclusively through a Los Angeles placement firm.

Bunt looked around at Mr. Garde's office. It was very neat, though somewhat damp. There was a poster on the wall that looked straight out of the seventies-- it was a poster of three arrows-- one brown, one orange, and one yellow, running straight and parallel, and then breaking into different directions. The poster said, New Directions.

Mr. Garde's desk was almost clear, except for his computer, which he was recovering from under a trash bag. The computer monitor was facing away from Bunt, towards Mr. Garde's chair and a window showing a view of San Francisco to the North.

Bunt asked Mr. Garde if he knew what had just happened in Labyrintspel?

Mr. Garde said that he didn't. All he knew was that someone had yelled something about a fire, and then the sprinklers had kicked on. Mr. Garde had been busy at his desk, and was still trying to get everything dry so he could get back to work.

Bunt explained that someone had put a smoke bomb in a package addressed to Labyrintspel.

The bomb had gone off and the smoke had triggered the sprinkler system. No one was hurt, said Bunt.

Mr. Garde said he thought it was pretty terrible that someone would play a joke like that on an entire office-- especially a busy one.

Bunt agreed. He said that he was talking to Mr. Garde at the time because he wanted to catch the person responsible for the whole mess. He showed Mr. Garde the package, and its return address-- which said "Scott Turner."

Mr. Garde was quiet for a moment, and then looked confused. He said-- wasn't it odd that a person would put their name on a package intended as a practical joke?

Bunt said that he had spent years as a detective before taking his job as a security officer, and he had seen criminals do this kind of thing all the time. Like returning to the scene of a crime, or even showing up in the crowd behind a newscaster covering the crime and waving at the camera. Some criminals had a lot of bravado, he said-- and, once they've gotten away with a crime, they think they can do anything and they won't get caught.

Mr. Garde nodded. He turned on his computer and told Bunt to watch the printer.

Bunt waited for about ten seconds, and then a piece of computer paper came out of the printer. It had an address on it-- a Los Angeles address.

Mr. Garde said that this was the strangest thing he had ever heard of, but that he had employed a man several years back named Scott Turner, back when the company was still called "Forward Thinking Enterprises". Mr. Turner had been in accounting, and had remained at the firm for about 2 months before quitting. Mr. Garde said that the address on the piece of paper was the address Mr. Turner had given Labyrintspel when he had been hired. Why Scott Turner would send a package with a smoke bomb in it to Labyrintspel was beyond him, and what was weirder was that he would have put his name on the return address.

Bunt asked Mr. Garde what Mr. Turner had looked like. Mr. Garde said that he was medium tall, with blonde hair and blue eyes. He was very slender, and very pale. Mr. Garde said that people at Forward Thinking Enterprises used to call him "Scoot" because he always walked as fast as most people run.

Bunt smiled. He thanked Mr. Garde, and shook his hand. Bunt said, we'll track down that Scoot and end his scamming PDQ.

Mr. Garde said that was good. He was about to turn away towards his computer again to resume working when he looked up at Bunt and said-- and your name is again?

Bunt told him, "Bunt Smith".

Mr. Garde said, good work, Bunt. I will give you a good review. I will talk to Mr. Peters about what you did today to help Labyrintspel.

Bunt thanked Mr. Garde again, and left his office.

He left Labyrintspel.

He walked out into the hallway and went up to the camera. He held the package in one hand and the smoke bomb in the other, and said to the camera, smoke bomb-- no problem. The red light of the camera stared back at him with nary a wink.

Bunt went down to Mr. Peters' office. Mr. Peters was on the telephone. Bunt told him that he had been patrolling near 4B when he had heard some shouting and an alarm. He said that someone had delivered a package to Labyrintspel with a smoke bomb in it, and that the smoke bomb had set off the sprinkler system. He said that no one had been hurt.

Mr. Peters said he knew all about it-- he had just been talking to Labyrintspel's receptionist on the telephone.

Bunt handed Mr. Peters the incriminating package and advised him to file a police report implicating Scott Turner as the practical joker. He showed Mr. Peters the return address on the package.

Mr. Peters looked a little confused. He said he would certainly file a police report, but that he was surprised that the practical joker would have put his name on the package.

Bunt said that Mr. Garde, the personnel manager of Labyrintspel, had known Scott Turner-- he was an ex-employee of the firm. Bunt said that Turner probably had had some sour grapes about something that had happened to him while he was working there-- or a had developed a really destructive sense of humor, one or the other.

Mr. Peters thanked Bunt for his thoroughness, and complimented him for his performance on his first day at the building. He said he would make a good employee.

Bunt thanked Mr. Peters, and said he was enjoying his job. He had even gotten to know a few people-- which was more than he had expected.

Bunt looked out of Mr. Peters' window at a cloudy California sky, and felt somewhat exhausted for a moment. Many clouds were flying past the sun very quickly-- there must have been quite a breeze that day, blowing hard off of the Pacific Ocean.

Bunt snapped out of his daze and told Mr. Peters that he would go ahead and finish his patrolling for the day.

Mr. Peters said that would be fine.

Bunt was about to walk through the door and out into the hallway when he suddenly turned around. He went up to Mr. Peters and shook his hand. He said to Mr. Peters that he was a good boss-- Bunt could tell.

Mr. Peters looked surprised and pleased. He thanked Bunt once again, and said that he hoped that he was. He tried.

Bunt nodded, and left Mr. Peters' office. He closed the door behind him-- for a third and final time.

Bunt walked down several hallways until he reached the exit door. He put his key in the lock. He turned the key, and walked out the door. Bunt dropped his key in the grass next to the exit.

He walked around the building to its Western side-- where the building's entrance was located. He got in his car, started its engine, and drove away. His smile was somewhat dampened, but he was smiling nonetheless.

He was now hot on Turner's trail.

Bunt stopped by his house and changed into a normal pair of slacks. He put on his tank top, and a button down shirt, and grabbed a map of Los Angeles from his desk. The map was a few years old, but it should work alright, thought Bunt.

Bunt got in his car. He headed for the edge of town. He filled his tank full of gas, and got on the highway.

Bunt headed for Los Angeles. He started thinking about fronts he could use to confront Turner. Could he pose as a salesman-- thought Bunt-- or as an F.B.I. agent? Probably a salesman wouldn't even get through Turner's front door. Most people said no thanks immediately to salesmen-- through their mail slot. An F.B.I. agent might do the trick, but if Turner was as smooth as Gellarty said he was, he would probably pretend to be someone else at the front door and get away out the back or something.

Bunt actually had a fake F.B.I. identification card he could use to nab Turner-- it was under his floormat, in case he got pulled over.

Bunt really wanted to get Turner. He didn't care if Gellarty went off with him-- just to see her smile and look interested again in something other than the clouds in the distant sky would be enough of a reward. The other \$4000 she was going to pay him wouldn't hurt, either.

Bunt adjusted his mirror.

He felt that he knew Turner pretty well-- his general appearance, plus his dressing habits-- nice suits, often of light colors, should be enough to give him a "make". He also knew that he

had been called, "Scoot"-- the guy was a fast walker-- and very skinny. Maybe he was a runner or a triathlete, or worked out a lot, or something.

Most importantly, he had his address-- Mr. Garde had given him his best clue yet. It should lead him straight to Turner.

Bunt imagined some blonde, wiry guy at an exercise bike, cranking it up until his legs were almost a blur, barely breaking a sweat or breathing hard. Maybe the guy was just an animal, thought Bunt-- a real fitness fiend. Or, maybe he was inspiring himself by looking at the butt of some innocent single chick on the stairmaster right in front of him. Bunt couldn't help but picture Gellarty's butt on the stairmaster for a moment, which made him flinch. Then, he had an idea--

He would pose as Gellarty's husband. He would claim to be on a mission to make sure that Turner didn't want her back, or wasn't going to try to interfere with their marriage. Turner wouldn't suspect a thing.

Once he had verified that Turner lived at the Los Angeles address, he would show up again-- the next time, with Gellarty. She would have to make a big decision then-- whether to propose to him or not-- and he would have to make a decision of his own-- without having the option of just running away with no explanation like he had before.

Bunt thought that Gellarty would probably ask Turner to marry her. She seemed really vacant and kind of depressed to Bunt, which, though it didn't hinder her appearance much, did worry him a little. Her life was wanting something, and she was wanting something. Turner had seemed to her like the perfect man-- attractive, powerful, wealthy-- and time probably had only make her fascination with Turner more intense.

On the other hand, he expected Turner to say no to her proposal. The guy just didn't seem capable of committing to anyone. He had stood up six women-- maybe more-- and, though Gellarty was an amazing woman, like a West Coast Gothic Rose, he just didn't have the backbone to say yes to a proposal and make it stick.

Bunt looked down at his waistline. With the uniform off and a normal shirt on, he looked pretty portly again. Plus, he hadn't bothered to put on any hair gel. His hair was, in fact, blowing around like crazy. You would think that would cure dandruff, but it tended to make it worse.

He thought about Rose. He wondered-- what if she had met him at the office building, where he was working as a security guard? He had always believed that she had left him because she had thought he was on his way to becoming successful and would be leaving town soon anyway for a better job. What if she had found him years later, in a more stable position? Would she have blown him off entirely, or would she have been more interested in him, or maybe even stayed with him for a longer time?

He felt a wave of humiliation. He had really stiffed Mr. Peters, and that guy had seemed nice.

He was probably used to people coming and going as security guards-- but had he ever had someone leave after one day, and without giving notice? 9 AM tomorrow would roll around, and Mr. Peters would probably wonder where the hell Bunt was. So would Mrs. Fram, and maybe even Mr. Garde.

Bunt liked being a detective, and was a pretty good liar when he needed to be. But he didn't want to make a habit out of it. He didn't want to be like Turner and start making commitments to all kinds of people and then breaking them without telling them why.

When Rose had left him, he had carried on for 2 days before realizing she was really gone. He had tried to call her several times, and she hadn't answered her phone. He had assumed she had left suddenly to visit her parents-- maybe there had been a family crisis or something. Finally, on the third day, he had gone by her apartment to check on her, and had seen a "For Rent" sign in the window of one of the first floor apartments. He had gone up the stairs to her apartment, starting to freak out a little, and had tried to open her apartment door with a key she had left him in case of emergency. The lock had been changed.

The sunny sky that day may as well have been filled with thunderheads-- Bunt wouldn't have noticed. He had driven home in a daze.

He had called her landlady, and she had said that Rose had moved out two days earlier, and hadn't left her a forwarding address or anything.

Bunt then had become somewhat violent. He had tried to think of someone to beat up, but it wasn't anybody's fault. He ended up kicking his kitchen trash can-- real hard. It didn't even have the good grace to dent.

Bunt then sat down intending to have a good cry, but suddenly felt his sadness, and a great deal of his joy, simply leave him. It was almost as if a part of himself had flown away-- where to he did not know. He ended up gazing at his apartment wall for a good long time, his eyes unfocused, tear ducts dry, unable to tear-- he was completely at a loss.

For the next few months, Bunt had felt flashes of absurd hope now and then. He had invented wild theories about how Rose might come back someday-- maybe she had had a breakdown of her own, and gone away for awhile to rehabilitate. Or had just gotten upset and needed to visit her parents to vent for a few months. Bunt couldn't imagine why she would have been upset, but, in a twisted way, he had hoped that was why she had left. Anything to imagine that Rose would come back.

He had even spent time at her apartment building, hoping to see her car pull up, or to catch a glimpse of her in her apartment window. Each time he would sit in his car, strangely excited in an unfocused way, yet, simultaneously on the verge of violence. Sometimes people would walk by, but when he saw they weren't Rose, he didn't care who they were.

Intermittently he would spend a few minutes looking at the point where the road met the sky,

staring with ferocious intensity at cars as they approached, hoping that one of them would belong to Rose.

Every time he had tried to wait for Rose to return, after about an hour or so, he would begin to feel heavy. His excitement would slowly dissipate, like air from a nicked tire. Usually this happened at about sunset. The giant red sun would topple, dying, into the sea, and an oppressive darkness, its shadows spreading like cold skeletal fingers, would slowly crush the day and the rest of Bunt's intensity into a mere memory.

If anyone had looked in Bunt's car window then, under the lonely light of a streetlamp, they would have thought he was looking at a ghost, not a man-- looking vacantly, unfocused, into the distance, seeing nothing, and not noticing that he didn't.

Bunt felt a deep, bittersweet sadness wash through his body. He felt that a part of himself had left and would never return, and that the West was really his now, with all of its vast, beautiful, empty vistas, their expanses stretching before him; forever a home for broken-hearted men.

Dusk had fallen over California, and the outskirts of Los Angeles was a crowded clutter of lights.

Bunt had been kind of hypnotized there for awhile. The regular stretches of gray highway, lit by highway lamps, and an occasional passing car, gradually brought him back to awareness. He felt, then, a sharpness, and an eagerness-- this was a new city-- mostly unfamiliar to Bunt. Under all of the sweat and fatigue was a man who was on the verge of an unpredictable opportunity-- perhaps a life-changing one-- and Bunt knew it.

He just had to find that low life Turner and figure out how to get him, once and for all, to stop running away from women like Gellarty.

He was going to dig him out of his hole-- pry him off the street like a smashed hubcap-- flush him out of his home, and make him his mark.

He thought for a fleeting moment of Gellarty-- her image seemed to float through his mind like a woman made of ether-- through her transparent body he could see Los Angeles growing larger, closer, and more vital.

This city was not quiet. It was like a network of apartments, clubs, restaurants, and office buildings-- many whose windows were still illumined from within. Cars moved along the city streets like digitized syllables in a telephone cable. The city refused to go to sleep-- it would remain active and full of energy all night long.

Scott Krull was taking Veval Hamm out to the movies. He pulled up to the most expensive Omniplex in San Francisco, and escorted Ms. Hamm to the theater door, while a valet parked his white sedan.

There were many people waiting to purchase tickets-- most of them, in fact, were as nicely dressed as Scott and Veal.

Veal moaned a little, and said to Scott that she thought they would never get tickets. The line was too long.

Scott told her not to worry, and ushered a now very surprised looking Veal Hamm past the line and through the theater's double entrance doors.

Scott walked right up to the ticket agent, and showed him a card he had pulled out of his wallet. The ticket man looked at the card very quickly, and said, Go right on in, Sir and Ma'am. Take your choice of films, and watch as many as you please. Here are two tickets for concessions, feel free to trade them in for popcorn, sodas, cappuccinos, or whatever you want at the concessions stand. These tickets are a \$20 value. Feel free to ask me for more complimentary concessions tickets if you wish. Have a nice evening!

Scott and Veal walked into the main lobby. Scott held her still for a moment and looked at the marquee signs above each hallway. After a moment, he said, There it is! The Fountainhead.

Veal seemed excited. Scott had said that The Fountainhead was a very important novel that had been made into a movie. The critics had given the movie bad reviews; this was because they had misunderstood the plot and had underestimated its significance.

Scott said that the character Howard Roark was one of the most important figures in modern fiction. His ideas about architecture, his philosophy in general, and his attitude and abilities defined what people mean today when they say the word progress.

If Roark had been alive during the 1980's, he would have helped to design the kinds of office plazas that made Reaganomics a lasting phenomenon-- and if he had designed them, they would have been more appreciated. Those office parks, like buildings designed by Roark, had been some of the most pragmatic constructions made in American history-- they remain as the best examples of the progressive economic optimism that existed during Ronald Reagan's presidency.

Scott told Veal that Roark had been a misunderstood genius, and only his wealthy patroness, presumably a literary personification of Ayn Rand, had tried to promote his genius. Scott pointed out that even Shakespeare had needed to have patrons, and that one of his most famous sonnets had been written about his beautiful, dark-skinned patroness.

Scott had asked Veal to pay very close attention to the movie, and to think about what Ayn Rand was trying to say about the world, and how important her ideas really were concerning progress and modernization. He had pointed out that a lot of people hated Ayn Rand, but that she had been the only 20th century writer brutally honest enough to write about what people really needed, prioritized and valued in modern society.

He had asked her to really think about what a Temple devoted to Man, rather than to God, might signify, and had suggested that Rand and her character Roark had been closer to exploring and portraying the true potential of modern man than anyone before them had.

Veal had been a little skeptical at first. She tried not to betray her doubts to Scott. Veal was familiar with radically new ideas like these. Like the mental stimulants people advertised on late night TV, they made people think that a pill or something can help make them smarter than other people, and it just wasn't so.

Her mother had always warned her against radical ideas that made big promises, like all of those fantastic body-building or mind-enhancing schemes, and other modern phenomena. She had, in particular, spent an hour or so making fun of Scientology, and had dared anyone to make heads or tails out of what L. Ron Hubbard was trying to push with it all-- Scientology was just a bunch of hype and technophilia.

Veal had agreed with her mother at the time, but had then learned that famous people like John Travolta and Tom Cruise were Scientologists. How could a philosophy be wrong when some of the world's most successful people touted it?

Veal had had a crush on Tom Cruise. He was like a perfect man, really-- handsome, powerful, intense-- and smart, somehow, in just the way a modern man ought to be smart-- in the way that enabled him to actually do things, not just to talk about them.

Veal had been similarly captivated by Scott Turner. He had seemed a little fanatical at first, but his handsome, powerful presence, together with the confident way he talked about things, eventually left little room for doubt.

Eventually, Veal had become completely entranced by Turner. She hadn't realized this until today, but she really had always need something like Scientology in her life. She often had high hopes, for example, but had no system to back her up when she had had them. People like L. Ron Hubbard and Ayn Rand (and, of course, Scott Turner) might really help her to become someone important.

Hallmark suddenly seemed like a waste of time to her. She could probably think of a dozen ways Hallmark could improve the way they ran their business, and felt that she ought to be the person who made these changes. Scott Turner, an esteemed American visionary respected her, and Hallmark should, as well.

Scott Turner and his ideas had made her eyes light up in a special way for the first time since George had left her. In fact, George had nothing on Scott. Veal was actually looking at the world around her with great enthusiasm for the first time in a long while. Today, for example, she had noticed that the script used on Walgreens signs was the same typeface her PC produced when she designated the setting, "Verdana Italics". She had realized that she had a graphics program that would let her turn her script into a graphic. Then she could fill in certain parts of the script with different colors, or even put a huge colored oval or square around the script and

make a template for a sign that way! Veval could quit Hallmark, and become a signage designer, and make a million dollars on her own. It would be so much bigger and better than designing greeting cards for Hallmark!

Bunt brought Veval a cappuccino and a huge tub of popcorn. Scott and Veval sat down in the theater that was showing the movie, The Fountainhead. Scott even made a man move over so that Veval could have a chair to put her coat on.

Veval was so excited that she was sitting on the edge of her seat, like she was ready to just dive into the movie screen and become a character in the film.

Veval found the film to be very engaging and convincing, and Scott's occasional remarks, pointing out, for example, Roark's university's rejection of his early architectural vision, and his first meeting with his patroness, the Ayn Rand character.

Veval thought that Roark could have been even better than he was. Why was his Temple of Man so short, for example? He should have made it into a huge skyscraper, with a metal steeple and a lounge for adherents on the forty-fifth floor.

After the movie, Veval felt a little spaced-out; she had been so carried away. But she couldn't stop thinking about Rand and Hubbard and Roark, and, especially, Turner, her superman.

She shared most of her ideas with Turner, and he nodded enthusiastically, and even hugged her, when she told him about them. He seemed to think just the way she did now about things. Veval had really changed in a few weeks, and changed for the better. It was like an American Revolution.

Turner took her home in his Cadillac Sedan, and Veval and Turner made tasteful but brutal love for many hours on Veval's brand new silk sheets.

Bunt pulled over from the highway beneath a very tall lamp. He took his map of Los Angeles out, unfolded it, and looked at it carefully under the streetlamp. It should be easy enough to find Turner's house, thought Bunt-- just a few streets off of the Northern border of Los Angeles, and he would be there.

Bunt looked at his watch-- it read: 8:30 PM.

Bunt pulled back onto the highway, drove for about 3 more miles, and turned off at exit 12b. He took a right at the stoplight, and drove straight for several miles. The street he was driving on was full of bars and lounges. Neon signs, quite new and sophisticated-looking, identified these establishments and tried to beckon newcomers inside. The bars had names like, "Big Fish in a Small Pond", "Tsunami", "Pacific Breeze", and so on.

Bunt hadn't been in a good bar in a long time. He liked to have a beer or two at home-- a

Budweiser-- but he didn't like drinking in public. It made him sleepy. He used to go out drinking. Eventually, he realized that he could only get that "good buzz" people liked once every five or so tries, and, when he did, he usually made the mistake of drinking five or six more beers quite rapidly. Bunt figured he wasn't so much of an alcoholic as a drinker who, once he was enjoying himself, simply wanted to have too much fun too quickly.

Bunt kept driving. He had to squint a little to make out the cross street signs. After about 3 miles, he found the cross street he was looking for, and turned right.

This street had a few bars, as well, but was mostly comprised of hip businesses like "Borders Books" and "Starbucks Cafe". This was the 'burbs, so things were kind of spread out-- a few businesses were in one strip center per block. Definitely the kind of neighborhood a person would have to own a car to enjoy.

Bunt turned left after a mile or so, and started looking for Turner's subdivision. The lights became more sparse, and, every quarter mile or so, you could see a sign illuminated with spotlights, surrounded by a few palm trees, indicating in flowing pastel script the subdivision of which it declared to be the entrance.

Bunt drove for about five miles down this road, through residential Los Angeles. He was beginning to get antsy when he found the subdivision he was looking for: Perpetual Oasis.

The entrance to the Perpetual Oasis subdivision shimmered a little in the evening heat. Waves of heat, stored in the road's asphalt, were still merging one after another with the night air.

Bunt turned right into Perpetual Oasis, and started looking for Mirage Lane. He found it after a few minutes-- it curved gracefully off to the left of the subdivision's main road. Bunt followed Mirage Lane for a half a mile, until he found the house he was looking for: 5645 Mirage Lane.

5645 was a ranch-style house with somewhat Eastern features-- the roof was slightly peaked, and hung over the side of the house, curving ornamentally at its edges. There were strange iron letters, in intricate script, screwed into the olive-green front door-- 3 of them. He couldn't quite make them out. To each side of the door were glass walls, about 3 feet long and six inches thick, comprised of what looked like the bottom halves of soda bottles.

Bunt drove on for about 50 yards, and parked his car in a darkened spot between street lamps. He didn't want Turner to know what kind of car he had, because he planned on returning with Gellarty tomorrow, and didn't want to scare Turner away when he did.

Bunt got out of his car and walked up to the front door of 5645 Mirage Lane. He felt extremely jittery, and simultaneously full of wild hope, as though he was a hot, shaken Coca Cola bottle about to explode in a fountain of sick warm syrup and carbonation. He pushed the doorbell with a shaking finger.

A chime went off calmly inside the house-- Bunt thought he recognized a measure from one

of Mozart's symphonies.

Bunt waited about 30 seconds, looking around nervously, and almost afraid to fix his gaze on the door.

No one answered.

Bunt rang the bell again, and waited for a period of time he could not determine. Then, he rang it three times in sequence, making the first few notes of Mozart's measure cut off and repeat rapidly.

The door opened. Bunt's heart skipped a beat.

From the darkness behind the door, a man's voice said: Yes?

Bunt said, Hello! I am a friend of Sean Gellarty's. He paused, and then decided to go on. Sean and I are married now, he babbled, and I want to speak with Scott Turner, please, to make sure he is okay with that.

Scott who? The voice said.

Scott Turner, replied Bunt.

The man behind the door opened the door completely, and said, come on in.

Chapter 7

He was moderately tall, and very broad at the shoulder. He was wearing an expensive-looking pair of tan slacks, and a designer Hawaiian shirt, hanging loosely over the top of the slacks. His hair-- Bunt grimaced-- was dark, and his eyes were brown. This man obviously wasn't Scott Turner.

Bunt went in anyway. He began to follow the dark haired man down a long entrance hallway.

Excuse me, sir? asked Bunt. Where is Mr. Turner?

The man said, without turning around-- And your name is?

Bunt, said Bunt. Bunt Smith. I am Sean Gellarty's husband.

The man with dark hair turned around suddenly, and two more men, neither of them resembling Turner, appeared at his side from the next room.

The man with dark hair pulled a wallet out of his pocket and flashed his identification card. Greg Torke, F.B.I., he said. These are my associates. Mr. Smith, please come with me.

The other two men took Bunt, one holding each shoulder, and handcuffed him. The man on his right emptied his pockets into a ziploc bag.

Bunt was led to what appeared to be the house's basement. The basement was finished, with wooden paneling and brown carpet, short shag. Bunt's hands were tied behind his back, but his mouth wasn't gagged, and he could move his head around freely.

To his right was a lamp-lit table with the contents of his pockets spread out on it. He could see his comb, his sunglasses, his map of Los Angeles, and a few pieces of lint.

Bunt was secretly relieved that he had not brought his wallet in with him-- or his fake F.B.I. identification card, for that matter.

The two mysterious F.B.I. agents were sitting on a couch behind the table. They looked similar-- not like identical twins, but like distant cousins, perhaps-- both with curly red hair, blue eyes, and short, stocky builds.

The tall, dark agent was standing in front of Bunt, looking down at him from his fully-erect height.

Agent Torke said, Well, Mr. Smith-- if that is who you really are-- what is your business with Scott Turner?

Bunt said that Turner had had an affair with his new wife, Sean Gellarty, about a month ago. Mr. Turner had left her without an explanation, and she had married Bunt soon thereafter.

Bunt said that he had come to Los Angeles to ask Turner if he was alright with that, and to request that he not interfere with his and Sean Gellarty's marriage.

Bunt said that Gellarty still talked about Scott Turner sometimes, and he was getting a little worried.

The agent paused for a moment, then nodded. He asked Bunt why he had tried to find Scott Turner at this address.

Bunt admitted that he had been trying to find Scott Turner for awhile. He had gone so far as to ask an old employer of Scott's, a Mr. Garde at Labyrinthspel (previously "Forward Thinking Enterprises", where Gellarty had said that Scott worked), if he knew where to find Mr. Turner. Mr. Garde had given him this address.

The dark-haired man said that Bunt was quite a detective.

Bunt said that jealous husbands often are.

The dark-haired man didn't laugh. He chewed on his lower lip for a moment, looking very serious, and switched gears.

Where were you December 8th, 1998? asked the agent.

Bunt thought about the question for a moment.

I don't remember, said Bunt.

One of the two red-haired detective looked up sharply, as though he thought he had heard something significant.

Try harder, said Agent Torke. This is important.

Bunt thought for another moment, and then had a flash of memory.

I was in San Francisco, said Bunt, dating a woman named Rose, and looking for a job. I was fresh out of grad school in '98.

Agent Torke said, Did you go anywhere near the East Coast?

No, said Bunt-- like I said, I was in San Francisco. Maybe when Rose left me she went to the East Coast. But I didn't.

One of the red-headed agents chuckled. The second one elbowed him.

Agent Torke took a deep breath.

Agent Torke stepped back a few paces, and said: Mr. Smith, I advise you to stop looking for Mr. Turner. You have no need to contact him, you understand? You will not try to find him.

I will tell Mr. Turner about your marriage with Sean Gellarty myself, you understand?

Bunt clenched his fist behind his back in frustration, but said, as calmly as possible-- I will not try to find Scott Turner.

Yes, said the dark-haired agent-- you understand me. I am going to untie your hands now, and I am going to show you out of this house, and you are going to drive away, and we will never see one another again, will we?

Bunt said, Alright, Agent Torke.

Try not to look so sad, said the dark-haired agent.

He untied Bunt's hands, and he and the two red-haired agents led him up a staircase, through a living room-type area, down a long hall, and out the front door.

Bunt started down the walkway, and, after a moment, he looked back. Agent Torke was standing in the doorway, with the two red-haired agents flanking him-- one on each side. Agent Torke waved somewhat mechanically.

Bunt turned back around and resumed walking towards his car, feeling weak and somewhat shaken. His wrists hurt a little where they had been tied.

The red haired agent watched Bunt disappear into the darkness that enveloped Mirage Lane. He looked up at Agent Torke, and said-- Does he know about the trial?

Agent Torke slapped him on the shoulder. Not sure, said Torke. He has an alibi, but it might be a cover. We'll put a tail on him and see what he's up to, and if he has anything to do with the Deacons.

Agent Torke said, Now go get Garde on the phone and tell him he has earned a bonus. Our arrangement seems to be working very nicely. . . and get the chief on the line, and tell him to get a make on one Bunt Smith, 25-30 years old, brown hair, 220-230 pounds, medium height. Plus, tell him to run a few loose tails on a 1993 Ford Fairmont, brown, license plate DSY-8U3.

When did you see his car? asked the second red-haired agent.

Security cam, said Agent Torke. Right corner sweep.

The red haired agents left Greg's side and disappeared into the house at 5645 Mirage Lane.

Agent Torke remained in the doorway for a moment.

Bunt's car did not pass him. He must have left by taking Mirage Lane to the South.

This Bunt Smith was a canny guy, in his own way, thought Agent Torke. I hope we don't have to tighten up those tails. . .

Bunt's car, viewed from a helicopter, would have been progressing steadily, though slowly, back along the route he had first taken to Mirage Lane. An onlooker might have been somewhat concerned about his mental state-- maybe he was an elderly driver, or somewhat intoxicated-- because his car seemed to weave a little now and then, and at 3 signals, the car behind him had had to honk before he started rolling.

Bunt himself felt crushed. That address had been his best lead so far, and now he would have to tell Gellarty that he hadn't found Turner-- and that the F.B.I. had somehow gotten involved,

asking him to break off the hunt.

Bunt felt a little like he had when Rose had first left him. He felt a certain heaviness-- an oppressive weight. He also kept drifting unwittingly into space; he seemed somewhat unconsciously to be protecting himself from the significance of what had happened that night. He couldn't seem to grab the bull by the horns-- it would have gored him until he had bled to death instead.

Bunt looked around him, having snapped into focus for a moment. He was back by the highway, in the bar district.

Bunt thought about calling Gellarty, but the task didn't seem immediately feasible, and he let the idea just drift away like pipe smoke.

Bunt's throat was dry, and his mood was downright apocalyptic.

He parked his car in a lot near several bars. He dug his wallet out of his glove compartment and put it in his pocket. He combed his dark hair back until the locks rested smoothly against his scalp. They were probably filled with dandruff, but he didn't mind. These kinds of bars were dark inside, and no one would be able to tell.

Bunt got out of his car and entered a bar called, "The Shark."

Bunt thought about sitting at the main bar, on a stool. But the lights above the drinks and mirrors would have made him into somewhat of a spectacle.

Neither were there any open tables.

Bunt walked around for awhile, and then bought a beer (\$6-- what a joke), in order not seem like he was a drifter looking for a place to crash.

After about 20 minutes, a group of shiny, tan, laughing young women picked up their fashionable purses, and their cellular telephones, and left a table in the corner of the bar empty. Bunt watched the three women walk by, and couldn't help, absurdly, gazing at one of the women's curves for a moment. Like three psychics, the women burst immediately into a round of the giggles.

Bunt sat down at the table. He took off his outer shirt and hung it from one of the chairs, so that people were less tempted to give him hell for taking up an entire table for himself.

Bunt looked around at the clientele. Most of The Shark's customers looked young and well-to-do. They looked, in fact, like models, only with a slightly off feature here and there-- eyes a little large or small-- just slightly so-- or, a nose that was just a little too small-- just enough to prevent them from being featured on the cover of GQ or Cosmopolitan.

There were a few men and women Bunt's age, but they were all dressed very elegantly, and seemed completely at ease-- the men in their work suits, jackets off or unbuttoned, cologne wafting pleasantly through the bar, set free by body heat-- the women in navy or tan work suits, or white shirts and slacks, makeup perfectly intact 15 hours after it had put on, speaking fluidly and easily about business or harmless details concerning their neighbors or girl- or man-friends, in spite of their partial or complete drunkenness. Bunt figured they would continue speaking just that calmly and fluidly no matter how many cocktails they drank.

Bunt didn't give himself the luxury of looking too long or hard at any one of the women. He felt that he no longer deserved to.

He sat at the corner table, with his back against the wall-- just like he should have, according to Thompson and McBain, if he was afraid of getting held up or hit. He could see everyone and everything in the bar.

Bunt thought about a story by McBain he had read-- The Con Man. Some kids had found what is known as a "floater"-- that is, a body in a river, of, apparently, a woman who had drowned. The body had had very few identifying marks. Just its teeth, its decaying fingertips, and a small tattoo that had said "Mac".

Thanks to the precinct's teamwork, the cops had identified the "floater" within just a few days. Cotton Hawes had done a search through another Precinct's records, and had found a missing person's file with a similar description.

With very little to go on, Carella's precinct had tracked down the killer-- just 150 or so pages later. They had reached an apparent dead end or two, but hadn't given up. They had found their man.

McBain was, however, a master of fiction. His stories were police procedurals-- but, much like that tricky old ghoul H.P. Lovecraft, he liked using somewhat fictive details in seemingly "real" forms-- neo-real dental records, apparently accurate police techniques, etc.-- to ensure that his ""realistic" detectives always solved their cases.

But this was real life. Bunt had had only a few clues to go on concerning Turner, and, though he thought he had come close to finding him, he had been soundly rebuffed at the threshold of success.

Maybe, thought Bunt, the man really is too smooth to catch-- just like Gellarty and the other women had said.

Bunt ordered another beer. He thought for some reason about the unfortunate people who had those terrible coke bottle glasses. You didn't see that very often nowadays-- just in your parent's yearbooks from back in the fifties. Wouldn't that give you tunnel vision? Thought Bunt. Like, if you were looking through the bottom of a coke bottle, and someone moved at the periphery of your vision, you wouldn't be able to see both ahead of yourself and to the side, would you?

Bunt looked at the bartender in an unfocused way-- as if through the pink film of some psychic eyelid. She looked like a fuzzy, sexy MTV Star that way-- like an Aguilera or a Britney Spears. She seemed to move in a crass way, though-- like she was used to being looked at. Female bartenders had that way about them-- they not to slink around, like other women at bars. The move around quite forcefully, from one customer to another. They don't want to cat about too much. That's because the female bartender is every drunk man's best friend sometimes a wife to be, as well.

Bunt finished his second beer. He had slammed it pretty quickly. He ordered another one.

There were times when Bunt seemed, for awhile, to escape from under God's thumb, with all of his debts and poverty and detective work, and to inhabit the white, starry corners of the universe, where cosmic nurseries were slow to arrive, and only a few, milky white stars glimmered prettily. For an indeterminate amount of time, Bunt Sidecull inhabited these starry corners of space. Who he looked at, what he saw, what his beer tasted like-- no one could really say. He was, for a short time, a sort of stream-crosser-- if Nirvana was everywhere that God wasn't. Or Scott Turner.

Bunt woke up in his car. He panicked immediately, then spotted his wallet, shirt and sunglasses on the floor of his car. Something was sticking in his ass. When he reached around to figure out what it was, he felt a terrible pain in his head-- beads of hot intensity had formed suddenly and exploded in his forehead. Then, it seemed as though a boiling pot of molasses with shards of glass in it was sitting on his medulla, and moving around made the molasses burn new and tender parts of his brain.

What was poking him in his ass, he discovered, was simply his comb.

Bunt, with fear in his heart, looked out of his windshield to see where he was. The car parked in front of him was a 1999 Honda Accord, light blue. His neighbor's. He was home, in San Francisco.

Sometimes you wonder why you ever doubted that there was a God. How Bunt had made it home in his condition last night was a total mystery. If he was like a cat, and had nine lives, he had definitely just used one of them up.

Bunt was not inherently a religious man, however. He choose not to dwell on the divine nature of his good fortune.

He got out of his car, holding all of the stuff he had taken with him close to his chest, trying to make the hot molasses sitting in his skull slide away from his eye sockets and the other most tender parts of his brain.

He unlocked his door, and went inside his apartment. It was mercifully shady and dark inside.

Bunt dropped all of his stuff on his living room table, and walked into the bedroom. Oddly enough, he didn't look so bad. His clothes had the casual, slightly-disheveled look of a beach-lover. His hair had formed a bizarre and somewhat appealing new shape-- with waves and ridges like the movie stars had. His face was clear, and a little tanned from the sunlight that must have come in through his windshield.

The virtual molasses in his brain, however, still burned awfully, and made it hard to move around. It flared up a little, causing him to wince-- which brought the pain directly into his eye sockets-- the sensitive parts.

Suddenly, Bunt had to loose his bowels. While his exterior seemed dry and somehow "sun-baked", as though he couldn't sweat a drop, even if he wanted to, his insides, apparently, were quite fluid, and somewhat toxic.

After Bunt had finished moving his bowels, he noticed that the explosion that had cleared his intestines had splattered all over most of the toilet seat and even the sides of the toilet.

Bunt cursed. he got down on his hands and knees, with toilet paper wadded up in his right hand, and started to scrub the crap off of the toilet. His head actually began to clear a little, and he was left with a light, almost euphoric feeling. He felt like this would be a good day to forget about everything important and just fly a kite.

However, Bunt realized, this was not to be. He stood in the shade of his blind-concealed living room and began to grapple with the idea of what to do next.

Turner was still his mark, and Gellarty had hired him, and paid him \$1000 of the total \$5000 he was due when he found Scott Turner, just to find the man and to take Gellarty to him.

Bunt's best leads-- his contact in Labyrintspel, and the address Mr. Garde had given him, turned out to be dead ends. Worse, he now had gotten involved with the F.B.I.. Who knows? thought Bunt. Right now his apartment might even be bugged. It's possible that he was followed to The Shark last night, and, from now on, he might be followed anywhere he went.

He had just lost all of his direct leads to Turner, he realized. He knew what he looked like, some of the things he did and liked to talk about, where he used to work, where he might have lived once, and that was about it.

Why, wondered Bunt, was Turner wrapped up with the F.B.I.? Sometimes, he realized, criminals the feds are hunting become protected, in a way. If the feds go undercover to catch, for example, a drug dealer, and someone comes around to his house looking for him, there is a good chance they will nab that person and start asking them questions, to see if they are involved with the criminal's illegal activities, or to stop them from blowing the feds' cover. Bunt remembered that one of the women he had talked to on the telephone had said that Turner had given her ecstasy, so she would have a better time when he took her out dancing.

However, remembered Bunt, the woman had asked him not to look into this aspect of Turner's life, and had been certain that he was not heavily involved with drugs.

Could she have been lying, just to cover Turner's ass? It was possible, realized Bunt, that Turner was such a charmer and a smoothie that he was able to get women to lie for him.

That would explain both his apparent wealth and his involvement with the F.B.I.. A major drug dealer would have been able to afford a beautiful car and expensive dates, very easily. He would have refused to give people too much information about himself, too, and would have done so quite instinctively-- in order to prevent people from sending the police after him-- particularly in order to prevent people from breaking into his home and searching it.

Maybe Turner was part of a huge ecstasy ring; "Forward Thinking Enterprises" had been a cover for a drug smuggling operation, and Mr. Garde had known about it all. Maybe Mr. Garde had even been getting a cut of the profits.

Turner had quit when Forward Thinking Enterprises was about to become a legitimate operation, Labyrintspel, and had asked Mr. Garde to send anyone who came looking for him to his house in Los Angeles.

If that was the case, however, realized Bunt-- the F.B.I. wouldn't have been waiting for him at Turner's dummy address-- Turner and his thugs would have. Maybe the F.B.I. was hot on Turner's tail, and had chased him out of his house. If they hadn't, realized Bunt, with a sudden feeling of fear and awe, he might have been killed last night by Turner's men.

Bunt didn't trust drug dealers, not at all. Even Duffy, an experienced police officer, wasn't allowed to handle the bigger narcotics cases. He had a sudden urge to call Gellarty, just to make sure she was all right. Hopefully, Turner hadn't sent his men out to kill or kidnap her.

Bunt dialed Gellarty's number. She answered almost immediately. Bunt breathed a huge sigh of relief, and said-- Sean! Sean Gellarty! You're O.K.!

Gellarty sounded annoyed. Of course I am, Mr Sidecull, she said. What's the big deal?

Bunt's happiness deflated like a gouged tire. He felt a familiar heaviness come over him as he realized what he had to tell Gellarty about Turner.

I have some bad news, said Bunt.

Is Scott dead? asked Gellarty-- suddenly sounding quite worried.

No, said Bunt-- it's not that. It's bad, though. Scott Turner is wrapped up with the F.B.I..

The F.B.I., said Gellarty? That's very strange. . . are you sure?

Bunt asked Gellarty if she had ever seen Bunt meet with any strange men or women, or if he had ever peeled off suddenly from a date or a night over at her house.

Gellarty said that he hadn't done either of those things. She just couldn't picture him getting wrapped up with the F.B.I., either. He seemed too clean-- maybe even too honest.

Bunt told Gellarty that when he had followed the lead he had gotten from Turner's old job to what was, presumably, his old address, he had found a bunch of Federal Agents who had tied him up and questioned him about what he knew about Turner.

Gellarty said-- Turner wasn't there? You didn't see him?

No, said Bunt. He wasn't there-- Bunt hadn't seen him.

Gellarty cursed. She told Bunt that she still wanted to find Turner, and that he had better stay on the case, if he wanted the rest of his \$4000.

Bunt felt next to tears because of her crassness, but understood, in a way, how clients could be. He said that he was worried that Turner was involved with something like a big time narcotics ring, and that the F.B.I. was looking for him. He warned her to stay away from anyplace Turner used to take her, and not to talk to him or anyone who claimed to know him or to be looking for him on the telephone, except for Bunt himself.

Gellarty said nothing for a moment. Then, she said-- whatever, Mr. Sidecull-- just stay on the case, and find Scott for me. Then you'll get your commission.

Bunt choked down his mounting anger and said, I will keep trying, Ms. Gellarty.

He hung up the phone.

Bunt felt upset and a little shocked. He had expected Gellarty to feel the way he felt about Turner-- that he really was a great risk to himself and to Gellarty both. She didn't seem willing to empathize with him at all-- in fact, she stubbornly stuck with her belief that Turner was a nice guy who had never gotten involved with drugs or anything like them.

Gellarty didn't seem to care that Bunt had gone all the way to Los Angeles and had been tied up by F.B.I. agents and questioned. She cared about getting Turner back, and that was all that she cared about.

Bunt couldn't decide what to do next. If Turner was involved with drugs, then even Duffy couldn't help him-- he wasn't allowed on most of those cases.

Bunt decided to call Duffy anyway. He asked Duffy to meet him for lunch at the Chinese restaurant that they always met at the bottom of the hill in Chinatown.

Bunt pulled into a spot not far from the restaurant.

It was a cloudy, moist day-- the tropical skies seemed to want to reach out and embrace Bunt and all of San Francisco, and to say that last night had never happened.

But it had.

Bunt found Duffy at a table in the center of the restaurant. He was in uniform-- and had several hours to go today before he could leave his job.

Duffy hadn't ordered yet. He was sipping on a glass of water.

What happened to you, asked Duffy.

What do you mean, answered Bunt.

You have red eyes, said Duffy-- and there's something stuck on your shirt tail.

Bunt said his eyes were red because he had been drinking the night before. In Los Angeles. He said he didn't know about his shirttail-- and then his brow furrowed.

Shirttail, he thought. Shirttail. Shirt-tail. Tail. Shirts Tailing Me-- What If They Are?

Bunt looked around the restaurant.

There were two men just then sitting by the window who looked a little different from the rest of the clientele. Too well-dressed, thought Bunt. Maybe too Los Angeles.

Bunt cursed to himself. Damn-- he thought-- it's the F.B.I.. One of those guys even has sunglasses on, just like in the movies.

Bunt smiled at Duffy and squeezed his shoulder thankfully. He asked him to come with him-- there was something he had to see.

Duffy followed Bunt out of the restaurant. They started walking up the hill. Bunt and Duffy made some brisk small talk-- they talked about Duffy's wife a little and their upcoming vacation.

Duffy said that his wife was very grateful for the gift Bunt had given them for their upcoming vacation.

Duffy kept looking at his watch. He told Bunt he had about fifteen minutes left of his lunch break.

Bunt picked up his pace, and Duffy matched his stride.

Bunt led Duffy into his office building. From the lobby, he looked out of a window and down the hill. One of the two men from the restaurant was halfway up the hill. He was looking around anxiously.

Bunt pulled Duffy quickly into the emergency stairwell, and led him up to his office. The two men went into Bunt's office, and Bunt locked the door behind him. The shades were already drawn.

The feds? asked Duffy.

Bunt said, yes-- the feds. He told Duffy quickly about his trip to Los Angeles and the questioning he had received in the basement of what was supposed to have been Turner's house.

Duffy seemed intrigued, and somewhat frightened, as well.

Bunt asked Duffy to check into any narcotics cases dated after December 1998, and to look, in particular, for any mention of Scott Turner, or for any wanted man fitting Turner's description: medium height, blonde hair, blue eyes, pale complexion.

Duffy said he would try to look through the open narcotics files. He might have to wait for a distraction in the office, or create one himself, but he would try.

Chapter 8

Bunt thanked Duffy. He pointed out that he and Gellarty might both be in danger, and that they owed him one. He also told Duffy that if any F.B.I. agents started to bother him on his way out, to just show his badge right away, and explain that he was Bunt's friend, and that they often had lunch together.

Duffy agreed.

Bunt led Duffy back down the emergency stairs, and let him out of the back of the office building, showing him an alley he could take down the hill-- where he could turn right and then right again and make his way back to his car.

Duffy and Bunt shook hands. Duffy started down the alleyway. Bunt watched the retreating back of one of his best friends ever, 2nd Lieutenant Duffy of the San Francisco Police Force.

He sighed, and looked at the all-embracing sky. It enclosed San Francisco like the ancient goddess Nut, and made Bunt feel at home.

Bunt walked back up the stairwell and into his office. He sat down at his desk. He looked at his desk. He looked at his clock, his envelope opener holder, and his ball-point pen. Over and

over again.

He had some time to kill.

About 1 and 1/2 hours later, the telephone rang in Bunt's office. He picked up the telephone. It was Gellarty.

She sounded excited.

Mr. Sidecull! She said-- you have to see this! Are you near a television set?

Bunt said that he wasn't, but that there was an old set in the lobby of his building.

Go to the lobby and turn it on to Channel 5-- and hurry! She said. I will wait for you to get back on the phone.

Bunt dropped the phone and ran down the stairs. He turned on the lobby television set to Channel 5.

Channel 5 was broadcasting a news update. Bunt saw a crowd of people. He focused on the crowd, and was able to make out, pretty clearly, a medium height, blond man with blue eyes, in a light tan suit, struggling with a reporter, and trying to get loose of him.

It had to be Turner! realized Bunt. And really, he didn't look like Bunt had expected-- he was handsome, he supposed-- but looked more Andrew McCarthy-an than Ike Turner-ish.

Turner broke free of the reporter, and hurried out of the camera's view.

Bunt looked at the center of the crowd. They were surrounding something-- or someone.

The reporter holding the camera moved closer to the center of the crowd and aimed the camera at the ground.

A pretty woman, aged 32 or so, with blond hair and a nice, floral-patterned dress, was lying on the ground. There were three paramedics surrounding her.

Bunt turned up the volume.

“ . . . one Veval Hamm passed out today near the Seaside Mall. Paramedics' attempts to revive her were unsuccessful. One Paramedic said that she seems to have choked on something, and to have died quite suddenly. Passersby noticed nothing until she collapsed outright. They claimed that she was alone. . . ”

The broadcaster summarized her report, and segued back to Channel 5's regular

programming.

Bunt had finally gotten a look at Scott Turner. He hoped that Gellarty had a VCR. . .

Bunt ran back up the stairs, a series of fragmented thoughts running through his mind, including-- poor Veval Hamm! and, was she his most recent victim? and, absurdly-- would Gellarty be mad enough at Turner now to become Bunt's woman?

Bunt picked up the phone. Ms. Gellarty? he said.

Yes! Said Sean Gellarty. That was him! Did you see? she said. . . that man in the tan suit. . .

I saw him, said Bunt. Don't worry. Ms. Gellarty, said Bunt-- do you have a VCR? Did you tape the broadcast?

She said that she had turned on her VCR and hit "record" as soon as she had recognized Scott-- she had hit "record" right away. She didn't give a crap what she had taped over.

Bunt told Gellarty to watch the 5 O' clock news and the 10:30 news on Channel 5 that night, and to tape both broadcasts in their entirety.

Bunt said that he would flip between Channels 2 and 4 at his apartment, and that he would stop by her place around 11:15 PM..

Gellarty paused for a moment, and then said, O.K. Mr. Sidecull. Will do.

Bunt said that these tapes could help him catch Mr. Turner, they really could-- and that he wanted her to be pleased-- this could break the case wide open!

She said, Great, Mr. Sidecull!, sounding more excited than he had ever heard her sound. I will see you tonight.

Thanks, Sean, said Bunt.

He hung up the phone.

Bunt prepared to watch the news. He was holding a half-eaten hot dog in one hand, but it didn't seem to matter-- not for a half an hour. He flipped feverishly from stations 2 to 4 with his right hand, his VCR recording the whole time.

Bunt managed to catch all but the first second or so of both channels' coverage of Veval Hamm's death. All of the 5 O'clock coverage was very similar to Channel 5's coverage from earlier in the day. Channel 2 was positioned a little closer to Ms. Hamm when they taped, and the segment showing Turner was clearer and larger. Channel 4 did not catch Turner at all, but,

rather, showed the scene from a slightly different angle.

Bunt turned off the television set, once he was sure that no repeat broadcasts were featured in the same half-hour. He finished his hot dog, barely tasting it.

Bunt spent the next three hours agonizing over his meeting with Gellarty. He had never been to her house, and, in fact, had only really seen her once-- at the cafe. He had communicated with her almost exclusively by phone ever since.

Bunt took a long, hot shower, remembering to scrub the very bottoms of his feet. He tried on various outfits-- even, half-jokingly, his security guard top, which seemed to hide his paunch very well. He was somewhat reluctant to take off the uniform shirt and jacket, but realized that Gellarty would have thought his outfit very unusual had he worn it to her house.

Bunt finally settled on a pair of loose, black, cotton slacks, which were pleated like Dockers to hide his waistline, and a comfortable rayon shirt, white, with short sleeves. He shaved himself, and then, in a retentive fit, shaved himself again, paying careful attention to the stubble on his neck and on the back of his neck, beneath his hairline. He considered shaving his back, but could not hope that Gellarty would see him with his shirt off that evening.

Bunt's neck stung quite sharply when he put his cologne on. He looked in the mirror, and saw that his neck had become slightly reddened where he had shaved it too violently. He could even see a few of his neck pores standing out-- they were filled with little red dots of blood.

When you look at a person's face on tv, you do not see their pores. Sometimes, a close up for a Stridex ad or such will show you a teenager's zit-ridden forehead-- Bunt couldn't even tell if those were real.

People like Clint Eastwood or Paul Hogan had rugged, seamed faces that were usually shiny with sweat or oil, and Bunt figured that their pores were as large and ugly as his-- although they never showed you those kinds of details on TV.

Most men on TV, however-- Dolph Lundgren, Jean Claude Van Damme, and so on-- had perfect skin, and even when they sweated, they never seemed to get zits or blackheads. Maybe they lived in extremely cool, air-conditioned houses, or, maybe their genes were descended from those of Nordic pirates whose smooth, pale skin and blond hair was perfect, clean and beautiful-- untouched and unmarred by long afternoons spent in super-hot, humid California offices or cars with crappy air conditioning systems.

Bunt slathered on a great deal of deodorant, and agonized for a few moments over the fact that a man's sense of smell is less sensitive than that of a woman. What that meant, realized Bunt, was that men might actually smell like stale sweat, thinking that their deodorant and cologne covered the smell completely, while, the whole time, women could smell some nasty, masculine smell. Of course, most women, like Gellarty, would probably be too polite to mention such a thing.

Maybe they should mention things like that, thought Bunt. If a woman was to say to him, Eew! You stink, Bunt!-- he would have been a little miffed, but, at least, would have known that he stank and she was willing to admit it.

Bunt could use a woman with a little honesty. The thought of a woman who was too polite to tell Bunt intimate things like that would make him jumpy and nervous. Maybe he would be able to tell that something was bothering her, but wouldn't be able to figure out what it was.

Some women would never tell men what was bothering them, even if their boyfriends or husbands asked them quite directly what was the problem.

Bunt could remember a time, when he was dating Rose, that he felt that she really loved him. They had reached that point in their relationship where there was true love. Bunt had felt so valued then. He was comfortable, for example, taking his shirt off in front of her. The chest she saw then was, simply, her boyfriend's chest-- the boyfriend she loved. It didn't matter if it had too much hair or was paunchy-- she loved him no matter what his chest looked like.

But, there were things Bunt wouldn't do himself. He had watched an episode of a sitcom starring Paul Reiser and Helen Hunt, for example, in which the Helen Hunt character was pregnant, and Paul Reiser had asked her if he could sleep with her anyway. She let him do it. Bunt imagined, with a shiver, something dilated or overextended in Helen Hunt that shouldn't have been invaded.

These kinds of sexual or intimate olympics made Bunt feel a little queasy. So, how could he expect Gellarty to overlook any of his mysterious masculine odors?

In fact, what if hitting on Gellarty was like a taboo? She was, he knew, still in love with Scott Turner. Maybe it was like she was Helen Hunt, with a very special baby, per se, in her stomach, that she was feeding with her blood and oxygen and food, and if Bunt was to try to hit on her, it would be like Paul Reiser sleeping with Helen Hunt even though she was nine months pregnant.

Damn, he thought.

Gellarty, in fact, had been cold with Bunt on the phone yesterday. She hadn't been concerned with his run-in with the F.B.I., and she didn't seem to care whether or not Scott Turner was involved with a narcotics ring. She still loved Turner, and could have cared less about Bunt.

So, how could Bunt expect Gellarty to become interested in him? Furthermore, how could Bunt expect Gellarty to become like Rose was for him-- not caring what his paunch looked like when his shirt was off, how he smelled, and such?

Bunt snapped out of his musings. He had been looking in the mirror the whole time without seeing himself. He could now. He looked really tired, actually, and somewhat sad. He was on the verge of breaking the Turner case wide open, but he looked like someone had just shot his

boyhood pet and dragged its corpse away.

In fact, Bunt felt, suddenly, somewhat doomed, like a man condemned never to marry-- like some Greek reveler, trapped on a vase, his arms painfully outstretched, forever reaching for someone who he would never be able to touch.

Bunt's doomed feeling persisted for the rest of the early evening, and was only partially abated by the shallow excitement he felt when he turned on the 10:30 news and flipped back and forth between channels 2 and 4, looking for an image of Scott Turner.

The 10:30 news did not cover the Veval Hamm incident at all. In San Francisco, an accidental death was no big deal, realized Bunt. What a huge, crazy city.

He sighed heavily, collected his video tape, unplugged his VCR, and took all of this paraphernalia plus a blank tape and a line splitter out to his brown Ford.

He started his car, and headed for Sean Gellarty's house.

Agent Greg Torke flipped off his television set and cursed under his breath. He turned to the red haired agent on his left and told him to get the chief of the phone and to tell him that Turner had been on Channels 2 and 5 at 5 O'clock, but not at 10:30 PM..

Agent Torke opened up a locked desk drawer with a key, and took out several newspaper articles. He flipped through the articles.

Chapter 9

The first article was headlined: "Jim Sands To Stand Trial Today For Deacon Clan Murders". Agent Torke scanned the article, and read a detail or two about a series of murders in New York in 1997 and early 1998. Five local aldermen had been killed, each by gunshot, during this 10 month period. These killings had taken place just before local elections. At least three of the aldermen had been opposed by politicians who had definite ties with the Deacon Clan-- a group of private investors who had obtained a considerable amount of clout in several local utility companies-- seemingly in an effort to "buy out" the electric, water, and gas utility companies of New York. These connections led back to the leader of the Deacon Clan-- its lynchpin, Jim Sands.

Agent Torke closed his eyes and wondered-- a monopoly on local utilities in New York! What if the three companies had been undermined by the Deacon Clan, and had simultaneously raised the price of all local utilities? If most of the local aldermen had supported the Deacon Clan, and, had, indeed, helped them to usurp the utilities, then any public outcry could have been tempered by the aldermanic support of the Clan and their holdings.

Not to mention the ominous possibility of Clan-imposed (faux) “strikes” or shutdowns / blackouts-- if the Deacons had been able to hire representatives who could have demanded money as ransom from the local government in order to end any shutdowns and blackouts, or, even, funneled money from emergency Federal grants meant to assuage the “strikers”, the Deacons could have made millions of dollars.

Agent Torke looked at the next article. It was titled: “Anonymous Witness To Testify Against Jim Sands In Deacon Trial“. The article mentioned that an anonymous witness, a previous member of the Deacon Clan, had turned himself in to the New York police, and had agreed to testify against Jim Sands concerning the aldermanic murders, and the Clan’s plans to take over New York’s utility companies.

The third article said, “Anonymous Witness Provides Testimony That Topples Sands“. Agent Torke skimmed the article. The anonymous witness, it said, had provided enough incriminating evidence to implicate Jim Sands for the aldermanic murders, and had, in fact, given the New York police enough information to arrest all of the remaining members of the Deacon Clan.

The witness, the article said, would remain anonymous, and would immediately be placed under Federal Protection and relocated to an undisclosed location, in accordance with the Federal Witness Protection Plan.

Agent Torke reached into the open drawer and pulled out 2 pictures. One picture showed a medium height, somewhat paunchy man with dark hair and blue eyes. The second picture showed a thin, medium-height man with blue eyes. The men looked, at first, completely different. But, Agent Torke had to admit, if a person looked closely and for some time at the two photographs, he or she would be able to tell that the two men were the same person.

Agent Torke fingered a folder in the right side of the drawer. It was labeled, “Scott Krull“. Inside the folder, remembered Agent Torke, was a list of employers, an automobile insurance form, some receipts for transfers made from Federal bank accounts to accounts belonging to Scott Krull, A business card belonging to one “George Garde”, and several other forms and documents.

Agent Torke sighed, and ran his hands through his hair somewhat anxiously. He placed a videotape in the drawer. It was a brand new tape. The tape was labeled: Scott Krull / Local San Francisco Newscasts 8/12/2001. He closed the drawer and locked it.

Agent Torke had hoped he wouldn’t have to add anything to that drawer for awhile. He had thought that everything was going well for Scott. The Federal Government had promised to relocate Scott after he had taken the stand against Jim Sands and the rest of the Deacon Clan in 1998. Agent Torke had been placed in charge of his relocation and his continued support and protection.

It wasn’t Agent Torke’s fault that Veval Hamm had died earlier that day. It probably wasn’t

Scott's fault, either. Apparently, the woman had choked on something, and had died very quickly. Unfortunately, she had had the bad graces to die on a public sidewalk in the middle of a crowd on a sunny day-- and, for some reason, Scott had had to be there.

Agent Torke thought about Bunt "Smith." He had been the first person to track Scott to his fake address. Mr. Garde, who Greg had placed at Labyrintspel-- an F.B.I. agent who had also been trained to be a personnel manager-- had been instructed to send anyone asking for Scott to the Mirage Lane address, whether they had come asking about him before or after his time spent there as an employee.

Torque had done some checking into Mr. Smith's identity, and had come up with some disturbing details. Apparently, there was no Bunt "Smith" currently living in San Francisco. However, a man claiming to be "Bunt Smith" had been hired recently by Mr. Peters of Labyrintspel as a security guard; he was the man who had questioned George Garde about Scott. Mr. "Smith" abandoned his job without notice, and Mr. Peters and Mr. Garde had discussed various reasons as to why this might have been the case-- including several somewhat ominous possible reasons involving corporate or criminal espionage.

The loose tail Agent Torke had assigned to Bunt "Smith" turned up something worse. "Smith's" license plates had been registered to one "Bunt Sidecull". Furthermore, "Smith" had been followed to an address in San Francisco that was leased to a man named "Bunt Sidecull"-- a private detective. Two of Torke's agents had followed Mr. "Smith" to a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown, where he had met with one 2nd Lieutenant Duffy of the San Francisco Police Department.

One of the two agents had followed "Smith" and Duffy to an office building, which contained several offices, including a telemarketers' firm, an insurance office, a real estate agency-- and, a business called, "Sidecull Investigations." A private detective agency.

Agent Torke figured out right away that Bunt Sidecull wasn't married to anyone named Gellarty. His reason for trying to find Scott? That was the real question.

It was possible that Scott had done something that bothered someone enough to hire a private detective to try to find him. Maybe he had slept with someone's wife, or threatened someone verbally, or something.

That didn't sound like Scott, though. He had been involved with the Deacon Clan, it was true, but had heroically volunteered to testify against Jim Sands. Aside from the potentially criminal affiliation he had had with the Deacons, he had had no previous criminal record.

Then again, sometimes people change their characters along with their lifestyles when they relocate. Agent Torke had handled a case back in 1993 of a man who had also been relocated. Before being relocated the guy had been a real womanizer-- he had had a chain of girlfriends, sometimes several at once, for years. Once he was relocated to Los Angeles, the man had denounced his previous sexual liaisons, and had vowed to begin a life of celibacy. As far as Greg

knew, the guy was still celibate.

Maybe Scott had turned over a new leaf-- to find it had been a nasty, moldy one.

There was another possible reason that Bunt Sidecull had been looking for Scott. It might be that the Deacon Clan had managed to track Scott down and somehow to find him in his new home with his blond hair and now-skinny body. How they could have found Scott all the way in San Francisco, with a new name and a completely different appearance baffled Greg. Worse-- it frightened him.

The Deacons had been a powerful bunch of people. They had almost succeeded in taking over all three major New York utilities-- a scam no one since the Communist Dictators of Europe had pulled off. If any of the remaining Deacons tracked Scott to San Francisco, then two bad things were almost certain to happen.

Number One: Scott would be killed. Very soon.

Number Two: Greg would lose his job.

Bunt Sidecull had seemed like a normal kind of guy. Maybe a little clumsier and more nervous than most people, but, for the most part, normal. Then again, he had had the caninness to drive away that night at Mirage Lane to the South, so that Torke and his men presumably wouldn't be able to see his car and his license plates. Actually, Torke had had a security camera recording pretty much half of the block the whole time, so Sidecull had been recorded getting into his Brown Ford Fairmont with its license plates registered to "Bunt Sidecull", anyway.

A woman might have hired Bunt Sidecull, thought Agent Torke, to track down Scott. Today, Scott had been on his way to meet a woman, hadn't he? A Ms. Veval Hamm? Well, thought Greg, maybe there really was a Gellarty, only she hadn't married Bunt Sidecull-- she had been in love with Scott. Then, maybe he had left her to go out with Ms. Hamm. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, thought Agent Torke.

Agent Torke put his hand on his forehead and thought for a moment. Then, he sighed.

There was only one thing to do, he realized.

It was the one thing that Federal Agents didn't like to do when it came to relocated citizens placed under their protection.

Agent Torke would have to track Scott down-- and to talk to him about Bunt, Hamm and Gellarty.

Bunt rang the doorbell at Gellarty's place. He was holding a VCR under one arm, and some VCR tapes and a line splitter in his other hand. His cologne was really quite powerful that

evening, and if Bunt had had that feminine sensitivity for smells that he had been worrying about earlier, he would have taken another shower, with lots of soap, to wash most of the cologne off of his body.

Gellarty answered the doorbell right away. She was wearing a designer sweatsuit, navy blue, that showed no cleavage, and, really, no body at all. A man could have worn that suit, thought Bunt, and he would have looked pretty much the same way.

Gellarty was, understandably, quite excited. She shook Bunt's hand with one hand and waved a VCR tape in her other hand-- rather than saying hello, she said, quite simply-- I've got Scott!

Bunt said that that was great. He seemed to be on the verge of saying something else, but his face kind of collapsed for a moment, his cheeks going slack and then, even, somewhat hollow. He went into Gellarty's place without a word and started to get down to business.

Where is your VCR, asked Bunt?

In the living room, said Gellarty. Follow me.

She led Bunt through an open doorway and into a nicely decorated living room, with a sofa, pseudo-expensive paintings on the wall, a nice, black-painted wooden table, and a television stand with a VCR and a television on it.

Bunt set his VCR on the floor next to the television stand. He plugged a cable into the back of her VCR from his VCR, and another cable from her VCR to a line splitter, which divided the cable into 2 lines. One cable he plugged into the back of his VCR. The other cable he plugged into Gellarty's television antenna.

Finally, he plugged the his VCR's power cord into an extension cord that Gellarty had, conveniently, near the television already.

Bunt asked Gellarty to have a seat, please, and to hand him her remote control. He asked her to put her tape of the Turner newscasts in her VCR, and to rewind or fast-forward her tape until it was just before the beginning of the broadcasts that featured Turner.

Gellarty did this with much enthusiasm. In about five minutes, Bunt was looking at the special report that had been on Channel 5 the previous afternoon. He checked his blank tape to be sure it was rewound, pressed "record" for a moment to advance the tape past the runner, and pressed "pause".

Bunt then asked Gellarty for her remote control. He pressed "play" on her VCR and "record" on his VCR at the same time. The television set displayed that afternoon's report, almost in entirety-- Gellarty had been quick to catch the report on her VCR.

There was Scott Turner, at the edge of the screen, yet quite identifiable by now, with his tan

suit, pale skin, and skinny arms grappling with a reporter and trying to get free of him. Scott Turner broke free of the reporter and left the screen, and then, the camera panned forward and down to show the deceased Veval Hamm lying on her back in a pretty flower dress, surrounded by paramedics, reporters and passersby.

The special report repeated this footage twice-- that must have been how Bunt had been able to catch the report on the television set in the lobby of his office building.

The footage ended with a summary and a segue.

Bunt hit "stop" on his VCR, and cued up Gellarty's tape for the 5 O' Clock broadcast featuring Turner. He pressed "record" when the tape was all cued up. The 5 O' Clock report was almost identical to the afternoon's special report, except that the footage was featured only once. Bunt recorded the 5 O' Clock footage onto his VCR tape, and then hit the "stop" button on both VCRs..

He turned to Gellarty. She was sitting on the edge of her sofa, leaning forward-- her eyes seeming to see only the television. She had a look that was both empty and hopeful, and Bunt felt immediately sorry for her. She looked just like he must have when he was sitting in his car many years ago in front of Rose's apartment, waiting with an absurd excitement for her to return.

He didn't know quite what to say.

Gellarty snapped out of it. She said, with a great deal of animation, that that was definitely Scott, and he looked just the way he had when she was dating him. What he was doing near Veval Hamm when she had died she did not know-- but she said she figured Hamm was one of Scott's old friends from Labyrinth or something.

Gellarty looked at Bunt with a gaze that was so full of nervous excitement that it hardly seemed able to fix on his face.

Bunt said, Ms. Gellarty-- that may be. Let's just get this tape together, and then I will take it to my contact at the San Francisco Police Force. He is very reliable, and he will be able to pass the tape around to the entire precinct, and maybe to several other precincts in San Francisco and California at large.

Ms. Gellarty said that there wasn't any coverage on at 10:30 PM on Channel 5. She looked a little upset. Will that be enough to find Turner?

Bunt said that Channels 2 and 4 had coverage of the incident, and that Channel 2's coverage had also featured an image of Turner, much like Channel 5's had. He said that a photo-quality image was often good enough for a make, and would, at the very least, allow the entire state of California to be on the lookout for Turner. Unless Turner stayed in his place for a long, long time, and never came out-- or, unless he left California right away, and, eventually, the United States-- he would probably be spotted pretty quickly.

Gellarty squealed a little, and gave Bunt a hug. Bunt would have been very happy at that moment, but her squeal had been, really, quite unbecoming. He patted her on the back in a paternal way, and pushed her gently away from him.

Bunt looked out of Gellarty's living room for a minute at the dark, vast, starry sky, until he felt his eyes go unfocused.

He snapped himself back into focus, and put his tape of Channel 2 and 4's 5 O' Clock broadcasts into Gellarty's VCR. He recorded the broadcasts onto his tape, including Channel 4's broadcast, just for good measure.

Bunt turned off Gellarty's VCR and television. He collected his two tapes-- the tape with the unedited footage from that night's 5 O' Clock broadcasts of Channels 2 and 4, and the new tape, with 4 broadcasts of pretty much the same footage-- one being the special report from Channel 5 that afternoon, and 3 of the 4 featuring images of Scott Turner struggling to get free of a reporter from one angle or another.

He unhooked his VCR, and plugged Gellarty's VCR back into the antenna without Bunt's line splitter.

Bunt put all of his tapes and equipment into a pile. He looked up to see where Gellarty was, and couldn't find her.

He heard a noise from the kitchen.

Bunt walked gingerly into the kitchen. Gellarty was at her kitchen counter putting ice cubes into a glass. One glass.

He said, Ms. Gellarty?

She said, Yes, not turning around.

I am going to leave now. I will let myself out. I will call you as soon as I hear anything from the police.

Gellarty turned around. She was drinking gulps of iced tea from a tall glass, her teeth slightly parted; between gulps, she was aspirating sexily just like she had the first day he had met her.

She said, O.K. Mr. Sidecull, somewhat blandly-- and then, with some excitement-- Call me as soon as they find him!

I will, said Bunt.

He left Gellarty in the kitchen, picked up his VCR, tapes, and line splitter, and left Gellarty's

place.

Bunt felt a heaviness descending on him , and a somewhat wild emptiness, that rivaled the mood that had hit him in Los Angeles when he had decided to get drunk at The Shark.

And, unlike the bartender there, Gellarty hadn't even offered him a drink.

Agent Greg Torke sat behind the wheel of a Black 2001 Cadillac Sedan-- a company car. His mirrored windows were rolled up, reflecting, from the outside, images of beautiful, tanned rollerbladers and men and women bound for the beach. Torke's engine was idling, and his air conditioning was on. The radio played music from a classical station very softly.

To Agent Torke's right, in the passenger seat, sat Scott Krull.

Scott was looking immaculate, in a white suit, his blond hair perfectly combed and lightly gelled.

Agent Torke told Scott that he had seen him on the news the previous day, trying to get away from a dead woman-- one Veval Hamm.

Scott said that was a shame.

Agent Torke said that most of San Francisco had also seen Scott trying to get away from Ms. Hamm.

Scott said nothing.

Greg Torke turned towards Scott and grabbed him by the collar of his white cotton shirt. He held his eyes to his own, and looked deeply in them, searchingly, for a moment.

Scott's eyes stared back a clear, calm, pale blue.

Do you value your life, godammit? said Torke-- DO YOU?

Scott blinked in surprise.

Of course I do, Greg. That's why I am here in San Francisco, right?

Agent Torke slammed his hand on his steering wheel, producing a very loud THUD. He was panting. He paused for a moment, until his breathing slowed down.

Scott-- he said. I had to pass tapes of that broadcast and 2 others on to my chief. It's my job to take care of you, Scott. I have already had one man asking around for you. If he is with the Deacons, or, if the Deacons start looking for you-- you will probably die. Do you understand

me?

Scott blinked again and looked out of the window and at the beach for a moment.

Who was looking for me? he asked.

A man named Sidecull, said Agent Torke. A private detective. Apparently, some woman named "Gellarty" hired him to find you. He tracked you all the way down to the house at Mirage Lane.

Scott was starting to look a little nervous. He said, Gellarty? trying to pretend that he did not recognize her name.

Greg, however, was an F.B.I. agent, and was not stupid. He could tell that Scott knew or had known a woman named Gellarty.

How did you know Ms Gellarty? asked Agent Torke.

Well, I. . . Scott sounded flustered.

Greg suddenly slapped Scott in the face. Scott grunted in surprise, and put his hand to his cheek.

HOW DID YOU KNOW HER?

Scott sighed, and something seemed to snap inside of him.

Greg, I dated her. She was my girlfriend.

For how long, said Agent Torke?

For about 2 months, he said.

Did she break up with you?

Scott paused for a moment, then felt his rapidly purpling cheek.

No, he said, I broke up with her.

Under what terms, said Agent Torke.

We were about to get married.

Agent Torke looked thoughtful for a moment, and then seemed to be on the verge of making an important conclusion.

And how about Veval Hamm, asked Agent Torke.

We were dating, said Scott. I was going to meet her yesterday near the mall.

For how long were you dating, asked Agent Torke?

For a few weeks, Greg, said Scott.

Agent Torke looked at Scott. He was no longer the paunchy, dark-haired New York businessman he used to be. He looked, in fact, a lot like a model from GQ, complete with expensive clothes, a thin, wiry body, and blond hair that was real enough and nice enough to fool a hairdresser. All compliments of the F.B.I., thought Greg.

How many women have you dated in the past 2 years? asked Greg.

Scott said nothing.

Agent Torke started to very visibly polish the ring on his right hand, which was clenched into an ever tightening fist.

Scott said, stuttering a little-- about 10. 10 women.

He looked at Greg with a mixture of pride and fear.

He leaned close to Agent Torke, and said-- *I had sex with them. Each and every one. Many times. I had sex with them until they begged me to marry them. Then I left them. I left them each and every one.*

Agent Torke looked like he was about to make a terrible connection-- like he was holding two opposite-charged wires very closely together with trembling hands-- and then he just couldn't bring himself to make them touch.

He turned the radio off and paused for a moment.

He looked at Scott.

Agent Torke said, Scott-- there is nothing illegal about what you did. I can't arrest you or turn you over to the police. I just want you to understand something.

You were stupid, Scott. you had it made. We gave you a new look and a new home, and we paid your way for 3 years. You could have done anything that you wanted to do-- you were free to do almost anything.

But you decided to be stupid.

You thought you were a new man, and an untouchable one. You thought you could get away with anything you wanted to get away with-- and you ended up breaking ten women's hearts, ten innocent women-- you ended up getting a private eye on your tail-- and, you ended up showing up on local TV way too close to a girl who had just then died.

Scott, said Greg-- you are a hairsbreadth away from blowing your cover completely. If any remaining Deacons find out who and where you are, they will kill you.

Greg took a deep breath, and his eyes smiled a little at their edges. And, worse, he said-- the chief will fire me.

Tomorrow we are going to have an important meeting, you and I, with a couple of important people.

Then, you are going to go back into the Relocation Program. We are going to get you a new look. I am picturing you as an overweight Irishman in, say, Rhode Island. With a pretty tight tail of Federal Agents, too-- at least, for awhile. That's what I see.

Scott closed his eyes-- he seemed almost to stop breathing for a moment. Agent Torke was afraid he was falling asleep-- or, maybe even passing out.

Suddenly, Scott opened his eyes. He looked at Agent Torke and silently nodded. A look of deep resignation was now in his pale, now tired-looking blue eyes.

Bunt Sidecull was on his way to meet Duffy, in his old brown Ford Fairmont.

Duffy had called Bunt that morning with an update on the narcotics angle-- no wanted man fitted Turner's description closely enough to be him. Duffy said that Turner probably either wasn't involved with any big time narcotics rings, or he had yet to be connected with any.

Bunt told Duffy that he had some new evidence, and that, this time, Duffy could do some above the boards work. He was going to give Duffy some videotapes that featured images of Scott Turner, and wanted the San Francisco Police to start hunting him down. Bunt asked Duffy to try to pin the Hamm death on Turner. He wanted the police to hunt him down to question him regarding her death, and then Duffy could take Turner to him, or him to Turner, once they had exonerated him.

Bunt was excited about some of the recent developments in the case, but he still had some questions, and was, to be honest, a little less personally involved than he had been at first. Gellarty, obviously, didn't give a crap about Bunt and thought he was just another serviceman to hire, pay, and say goodbye to.

If Turner wasn't involved with a narcotics ring, then the ecstasy he had give his girlfriend

hadn't really been that big of a deal-- it had been just a mistake for Turner, rather than a criminal habit or profession.

Why, then, were the Feds interested in Turner? Why did they lead Bunt to the house at Mirage Lane, and why did they tie him up and question him?

Furthermore, what had happened in New York three Decembers ago?

Bunt parked his car in front of the Chinese restaurant. He walked in the restaurant's front door, a videotape in one hand, and looked around for Duffy. He didn't see him.

While he continued looking, two men, who must have been sitting at a table near the entrance to the restaurant, appeared at Bunt's side, and grabbed him firmly by his shoulders.

Bunt looked up, startled.

They were feds, he realized. Their clothes were a little too nice to be pedestrians', and, as always, one of them was wearing sunglasses indoors. When would they ever figure out not to do that, wondered Bunt?

The two agents ushered Bunt out of the restaurant, and forced him to get in the back seat of a shiny black Cadillac Sedan. They took his videotape and one of the agents put it in a briefcase and closed the briefcase.

A company car, thought Bunt.

The two agents got in the driver and passenger seats of the car, and they started the car's engine. A protective shield, somewhat like a cabby would have had, only without a slot for paying, separated Bunt from the 2 agents.

Air conditioning filled the back seat of the car, making Bunt shiver a little. One of Mozart's symphonies played softly in the speakers behind Bunt's head.

Bunt had a lot of questions. Was he being taken in? Were the feds arresting him for some reason? He had, he realized, broken his promise to Agent Torke, and had continued to investigate Scott Turner. Maybe Agent Torke was going to give him a talking to. He might even have to break off the case.

Of course, Bunt couldn't have asked any of these questions, because a soundproof shield prevented his voice from reaching the 2 agents. They probably wouldn't have answered Bunt's questions, anyway. Federal Agents rarely do.

The agents parked behind a car that was identical to theirs just off the San Francisco beach. The 2 agents opened the back seat door, and ushered Bunt out of the car.

The 2 agents led Bunt to a small stand of trees whose leaves were blowing like small sails in the Pacific breeze. The sound of the sea was loud but not overpowering here.

Three people joined Bunt and the 2 agents almost immediately.

Bunt recognized, with a great deal of surprise, Agent Greg Torke, Sean Gellarty-- and Scott Turner.

Bunt looked at Gellarty, but she refused to meet his gaze. She seemed upset.

Agent Torke walked up to Bunt, and shook his hand. Mr. Sidecull, he said-- we meet again.

Bunt said, Hello, Agent Torke.

Agent Torke asked the agent with the briefcase to give him the videotape. The agent handed him Bunt and Gellarty's tape of Scott Turner. Agent Torke put his finger between the exposed portion of videotape and the tape's plastic innards and pulled the tape sharply until it snapped. He tossed the broken videotape into a nearby trash can.

Agent Torke cleared his throat.

This, Mr. Sidecull, he said, gesturing towards Scott Turner, is the man you have been looking for. And, as I have already explained to Ms. Gellarty here, this is a man you will never know.

In fact, said Agent Torke, after today, neither you nor Ms. Gellarty will ever see this man again.

Bunt was about to protest, but Agent Torke held out his hand to keep him in check.

Before you start to argue, Mr. Sidecull, realize this-- Scott is a very special man. He helped us a few years ago with a very important matter, and now, we are going to protect him and keep him safe.

The Federal Witness Protection Plan! realized Bunt. That must have been what happened in New York back in 1998-- Scott testified as a key witness in some big trial, and the feds relocated him to San Francisco. . .

Agent Torke continued, breaking Bunt's rapidly developing thoughts.

Scott, however, he said, has an apology to make. It seems that he ended up using his new look and identity here in San Francisco to do a little womanizing. More than a little, actually. Isn't that right, Scott?

Bunt looked at Scott Turner with a good deal of anger. This was the man who had taken advantage of Sean Gellarty and a great many women besides-- perhaps, even, of Veval Hamm. . .

Scott looked back at Bunt Sidecull with pale blue eyes that seemed to say nary a thing. He seemed, in fact, to be miles away, like a billboard for last month's GQ.

He cleared his throat, and said, simply-- Sean, Mr. Sidecull-- I am sorry.

Scott then turned and looked at the Pacific Ocean. He seemed to become immediately lost in it-- borne away by its waves.

The 2 agents took Turner by the shoulders and led him away-- to where, Bunt did not know.

What an asshole, thought Bunt. A heroic son of a bitch.

Agent Torke said to Gellarty and Bunt-- I apologize for any confusion Scott and I may have caused over the past few weeks, and, in particular, for Scott's behavior towards you, Miss Gellarty. But, it is important for you to know that we are taking Scott away-- very far away-- and neither of you will ever see him again. We owe him this favor, you see, for the help he gave us a few years ago.

So, this is goodbye, Ms. Gellarty, and this is goodbye, Mr. Sidecull. It would be for the best that we never meet again.

Agent Torke walked down the paved beachside path to the South. Bunt watched him fade steadily away, looking strangely anomalous walking alongside the beach in his expensive black suit.

Bunt was left alone with Sean Gellarty under the stand of trees.

Gellarty looked as though a deep heaviness had come over her. Her eyes seemed far away, and her gaze kept wandering, as though she was looking for something, and just not finding it.

Or someone, thought Bunt.

Bunt moved to Gellarty's side, and tried to put his arm around her shoulders in order to comfort her.

Gellarty pushed his arm away.

She paused for a moment, and took her checkbook out of her purse. She took out a ballpoint pen, opened up her checkbook, and wrote out a check.

She said, Thank you, to Bunt in a cold voice. You found Scott for me. This is your payment. You earned it.

Gellarty looked up at Bunt and handed him the check-- but she seemed already to be a

thousand miles away.

Bunt took the check and thanked Gellarty.

Without replying, she started walking along the paved beachside path to the South.

Bunt said, suddenly-- "Don't give up, Sean! Don't give up. You'll find a better man!"

Gellarty turned back halfway around. To Bunt, she seemed to be smiling.

Gellarty turned back to the South, and Bunt watched her beautiful West Coast Gothic self slowly disappear into the distance.

Bunt looked at the check Gellarty had given him. It said \$4000, just like they had agreed. He put the check in his wallet, and started looking for a cab. Bunt was headed for the heart of San Francisco.

Bunt Sidecull stood in front of a plate glass window, intently looking at what lay behind it.

There were shoes behind the window.

Some of the shoes were brown, some were maroon, and a few were black. They were all used, but they had been polished to a high gloss, and looked very nice.

Bunt had his eye on one pair in particular-- a pair of shiny black wingtips with small, ornamental black tassles, just like the shoes his father used to wear.

Bunt opened the front door of the Turnabout shoe store and went inside.

Writing Achievements

As Of 11/12/2017

2016

5/16 "Fast Food" by Thomas Park is scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", June 2016

5/17 "Customer Service" and "The Barista" are scheduled to be published in Spillwords, June 2016

5/22 "The Librarian's Song" and "The Copy Center" are scheduled to be released in Spillwords, June 2016

5/24 "Customer Service" is accepted to be published at Birdsong Publishing, in a collaborative trade paperback

5/26 "For T.S. Eliot", "To A Young Lady" and "A Wife In Politics" were accepted to be published in Spillwords.com, July 2016

5/27 "Fast Food" is elected the Poem of the Day at the "Canvas Of My Soul Public Sight" group on Google Plus

5/31 "Ode To The Modern Seafarer" by Thomas Park is scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", August 2016

6/6 A poem by Thomas is read aloud at the Scribbler's "Transformation" competition

6/7 "Poetry" by Thomas Park is scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", August 2016

6/10 Thomas' poem "Santa Cruz" is accepted into a series at Silver Birch Press called "BEACH & POOL MEMORIES"

6/13 Spillwords.com puts up a page for Thomas Park, and a series of his poems begin to show up on their website

6/14 Thomas' poem "A Love Poem" is the moderator's pick for "Poem Of The Day" at the online Google Plus "Poetry" community

6/15 "To Hamlet" and "Chicago" by Thomas Park are scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", September 2016

6/16 Thomas' poem "Away To School" is accepted into a series at Silver Birch Press called "WHEN I MOVED"

6/17 "Onkama, Michigan", "A Love Poem" and "Ottawa, Kansas" by Thomas Park are scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", September and October 2016

6/21 "Poetry Submission" and "Honeymoon In Mexico" are scheduled to appear on Spillwords.com in October 2016

6/27 "Pinball Wizard" is scheduled to appear on Spillwords.com in November 2016. Spillwords asks Thomas to submit poems for publication on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

6/30 Thomas' 2 poems about Thanksgiving and Christmas are slated to appear on Spillwords.com on or around those holidays

7/2 Spillwords magazine interviews Thomas for a new feature about poets

7/16 Birdsong Publishing features a poem by Thomas Park in their anthology, "Millennium Poets & Poems: Birdsong Anthology 2016 (Volume 1)"

7/19 Thomas' poem "If I Had A Child" is scheduled to appear in an Anthology hosted by Silver Birch Press, called "If I"

7/28 "The Silent President" is accepted to be published by Spillwords.com in November 2016

8/7 Silver Birch Press publishes "Santa Cruz"

8/20 "Grandad's Safe" is accepted to be published for a Silver Birch Press anthology entitled "Prized Possessions". Thomas Park becomes the "Spotlight Writer" at Spillwords.com .

9/23 Silver Birch Press publishes "Away To School"

9/29 Silver Birch Press agrees to feature "Knit Cap" in their anthology series-- "Me- In A Hat"

10/23 Silver Birch Press publishes "If I Had A Child" as part of their "If I" Anthology

11/9 Silver Birch Press publishes "Grandad's Safe" as part of their "Prized Possessions" Anthology

12/9 Silver Birch Press publishes "Knit Cap" as part of their "Me, In A Hat" Anthology

12/25 Spillwords.com publishes a special poem by Thomas Park called "Christmastime"

2017

2/1 Arteidolia Magazine posts "New Industrial Music", an essay about music

7/1 Arteidolia Magazine posts "A Machine Music Manifesto", an essay about music

8/8 Entropy Magazine publishes "A Poetry Of Lossy Media"-- an essay by Thomas Park about analog cassette tape music

9/5 Arteidolia Magazine posts "A Poetry Of Lossy Media"-- an essay by Thomas Park

9/14 Thomas releases his novella, "The Hunt For Scott Turner", on archive.org in the Community Texts collection

11/6 Thomas posts approximately the first 5 weeks of his blog, "A Schizophrenic Perspective", in the Community Texts collection at Archive.org